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C. V. Davis

Gardner-Webb University

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THE
BROAD RIVER
REVIEW

Volume 46
Spring 2014

The Literary Review of Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, North Carolina

THE BROAD RIVER REVIEW

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EDITORS' NOTE

Each year, the *Broad River Review* publishes a number of contest winners. The J. Calvin Koonts Poetry Award is awarded to a senior English major at Gardner-Webb University whose group of poems is judged most outstanding by a committee of department members. In addition, the *Broad River Review* publishes the winners and select finalists of the Rash Awards, named in honor of Ron Rash, a 1976 graduate of Gardner-Webb University. Rash's first published poem, "Last Night Ride," appeared in the pages of this literary review the year of his graduation. Since then, of course, Rash has worked tirelessly to become a prize-winning writer and *New York Times* bestselling author. So far, he has published thirteen books in all—four books of poetry, five books of short stories, and five novels. A new novel from Rash, *Above the Waterfall*, is forthcoming in November 2014 from Ecco Press.

We would like to thank Wiley Cash and Joseph Bathanti for serving as judges for the Rash Awards in Fiction and Poetry, respectively. Cash selected Tom Howard, of Arlington, Virginia, to receive the fiction award, while Bathanti picked Jessica Glover, of Stillwater, Oklahoma, as winner of the poetry award. Congratulations to both winners, who received \$500 each and publication in the 2014 issue. We would also like to acknowledge an issue that arose with this year's fiction contest. Per our contest rules, the Rash Awards permit simultaneous submissions. Inevitably, each year some entries are withdrawn because of acceptance elsewhere. However, our winning story by Tom Howard suffered the unusual coincidence of winning our contest and being accepted at another journal at virtually the same time. Howard's story was judged to have won the Rash Award in Fiction according to our rules. Ultimately, we did not feel it would have been a fair decision to take this honor away from him after the judging was complete. Thus, "Grandfather Vampire" will also be appearing in another journal as well as the *Broad River Review*.

We would also like to thank every writer who submitted to us or entered our contests. A full list of finalists can be found on our website, www.broadriverreview.org. Our next contest submission period will coincide with our regular submission period, which will be August 15–November 15, 2014. Full submission information and guidelines, including profiles of the judges, will appear on our web site in July.

Finally, the editors would like to thank the Department of English Language and Literature for its continued support, both financially and in spirit. The editors would also like to thank university administration for its sustained backing of a literary review, especially during difficult economic times when some university-sponsored publications are not surviving.

JESSICA GLOVER

The Tillage

for the woman scalped by her panther

Ask me again about the jaw clench—clean
 through a severed deer leg and the quiet
languor that accompanies the pacing shadow
 after feeding time. I'll tell you of the emptiness
 that comes with any passion—the pitiful
ache of loving that which only obeys hunger.

The first time she reached for me, my heart
 lunged back in its cable mesh, stupendously
alive, aware only of the crude blood
 coursing through my veins. The betrayal
 so subtle: a frail graze across the boot tips
lipped on the berm, as if we touched by chance.

I backskuttled. The wide mouth
 bucket tipped over, rolled into the hollow
feeding range. She didn't pounce like I imagine
 she might wild, across the fallowed continents
 toward the taut throat of a jackal. She froze,
focused. Scurried forward, dragged the carcass

back to her perch. Flatfooted, paws spread wide
 open, she hunched over the hulk, head titled close,
began the rhythmic rock with auric eyes
 closed. Muscle and bone, the nightly victuals dropped
 into the sawdust mounding the cage corners
like blown confetti after a spring formal.

The next time was different; she waited for me
 to turn away first. Rules are always broken.
I knew the stainless steel wire would give
 against the weight. The challenge is to negotiate
 the confines of our captivity. The challenge is *always*
to negotiate the confines of our captivity.

Would it surprise you if I told you

I wanted in? I wanted to touch the fulgor of black
rosettes against the black pelage. Please—Nothing
more than the rapt mewl and sinew stench, the hopeless
situation of being wrenched under the rend
separating our two worlds, ethereal as vibrissae.

Please—She's slinking across the Kalahari desert.

All teeth and tongue. I'm her red hartebeest, exposed
thoughts licked pure. Please—Let me go
where natural grace, ancient as the puce dirt breach
between us, winnows the pain. Not until the sun's swell
does she continue her fence line vigilance.

You wouldn't understand. A woman like me

needs the security that something waits for her,
needs to stare into the vulgar pulp and come back
with an answer. A woman like me knows better
and lies down anyway, plays prey for the shameless
hunt, gives her unsanctified flesh wholly to desire.

TOM HOWARD

Grandfather Vampire

The nickname came from Praeger of course, who said it was because Mr. Leary looked like a vampire who'd stepped into the sunlight a million years ago and got bleached white as bone and was condemned to walk the earth in torment, only he ended up in Westover married to Mrs. Leary who taught us grammar. The name stuck but kids mostly didn't like Grandfather Vampire on account of the story Eddie Pastornicky told in second grade about seeing him fire a salt pellet at Rusty, who was Eddie Pastornicky's neighbor's Lhasa Apso, but there was also speculation that he was just mean because of some spell of tragedy way back. Maybe from the war but we didn't know which war, since we didn't know exactly how old he was (between forty and eighty-five was the speculation), or when the wars in question had actually happened. And anyway Mrs. Leary never said anything about a tragedy. When she talked about Grandfather Vampire it was to instruct us on not making damfool decisions, for example Mr. Leary wanting to buy the Super One-Thirty drive-in movie theater that was buried in the high weeds behind the Shute Beach apartments, despite Mr. Leary not knowing anything, as Mrs. Leary put it, about anything. She liked to teach us moral lessons along with the grammar.

Mrs. Leary died the third week of June right after school let out, and for the next two weeks nobody saw Mr. Leary out on his porch. The lawn got overgrown pretty quick and the lights were always off, and there was some speculation that he was dead too, probably because of some damfool thing he'd done, only we were all too scared to knock on the door to check on account of Rusty the Lhasa Apso, and also him being Grandfather Vampire.

Then one night when it was still early in the summer I was staying over at Praeger's, in the back bedroom of one of the second-story units at Shute Beach, and Praeger turned out the lights so we could discuss the five most terrifying nightmares we ever had, and he looked out his window and said, "Son of a bitch," which is what he always says. I got up and looked and I saw it too: a light burning in the projectionist's booth at the Super One-Thirty, and a long thin shadow bent nearly in half, the head bobbing up and down now and then. Praeger grabbed his binoculars and said, "Son of a bitch," then handed them to me and I said, "Son of a bitch." Because it was Grandfather Vampire who was standing there in that booth, holding a

screwdriver as if he'd never seen one before in his life. Praeger grabbed the binoculars back from me, then I grabbed them back from him, and it went on like that for a while, neither of us saying a damn thing. Then the light went out in the projectionist's booth and we saw Mr. Leary drive away. Praeger said, "I'm gonna go fix it for him," and then he was hanging out the window by his fingertips and then he jumped, without even bothering to put on his shoes, exactly like a damfool. But I followed him.

Took him the better part of the night to fix the projector, and took me running back and forth to get supplies all night, and in between there was a lot of Praeger scowling and asking where the hell the intermittent sprocket was, and who the hell designed these cambers, etc., which I figured was mostly an excuse for him to say hell and to show off, but he got it fixed. He wrote up some notes for Mr. Leary on how to thread the reels, then we left.

Next night I was back at Praeger's and we watched through the binoculars as Mr. Leary came back to the booth. He saw what Praeger had done, read the note. Looked out the window. Left the booth. Praeger and me started discussing top five most lethal creatures on the planet not including snakes. Hour later Mr. Leary came back carrying two reels of film. Hour after that he was still sitting on the floor of the booth, film everywhere, looking damn lost, looking exactly like an old lost vampire.

Praeger sighed and said "Son of a bitch," and started getting dressed.

Short time later I was leaning against the inside of the booth while Praeger got the reels threaded up. Mr. Leary stood off to the side watching him work, bony arms hugging his shoulders, and every few seconds he looked over my way. I was doing my best to become invisible, on account of suddenly remembering the time a few years back that Grandfather Vampire almost backed over me with his car when I was riding my Big Wheel past his house. Dragged me home and stood there in the doorway with one bony hand clutching my shoulder as he yelled at my mom. But he didn't let on if he remembered now. Just nodded at me when he finally caught my eye, and I nodded back.

Praeger finally got it all set up, and a minute later we were sitting out front of the booth in lawn chairs, amidst the high weeds, watching Mr. Leary's movie. Only it wasn't a movie exactly, just a white screen. Or almost a white screen, because you could see some shadows moving around and whatnot, but that was about it. ("Son of a bitch," I whispered to Praeger, but he just ignored me and kept watching.)

Mr. Leary stayed in the booth and didn't say a thing during the film. But when it was over he offered us both a dollar a night to come out the rest of the summer, every night around midnight, till school started up again.

Praeger to run the projector and me to do concessions, which seemed like the easier job to me on account of there not being any actual customers per se.

So the next night we snuck out again, and Praeger found a new set of reels waiting for him and got them threaded up while I pretended to do stuff around the concession stand. Once the movie started we watched from the lawn chairs, eating stale popcorn and drinking some questionable root beer that Praeger'd brought from his basement. Mr. Leary, same as before, watched from the booth. Hands folded in his lap, body like a stone, only his eyes completely alive as he watched the screen.

Still wasn't what I'd call a movie. No title at all, just started straight off with what looked like a funeral. ("In media res," Praeger said, and I said "Yeah sure." Damn Praeger.) Only a handful of people at the gravesite, which seemed sad enough to me, but the scene was notable mainly because of the damn small casket they were lowering into the ground. Reminded me a lot of Donnie. Not his actual funeral, but I mean the way everything looked that day. Sun was going down in the background and it was fierce beautiful, all violets and golds like something out of a dream. I'd wanted to say something at the time but didn't, since nobody wants to hear about some beautiful sky at a funeral. I wouldn't want to hear that either. So I apologized to Donnie in my head and kept my mouth shut.

People finally started to leave. It was autumn and bronze leaves were falling and again I thought it was kind of a pretty scene, spite of everything. Then the camera just hung around the grave for a little too long, which didn't please me any. I started to itch. Looked over at Praeger and he refused to even raise his eyebrows like he does sometimes to make me feel less nervous.

Then son of a bitch, a hand came snaking out of that grave. I bounced off the lawn chair and took off running, but when I looked back Praeger hadn't moved, barely even looked in my direction. I had a mind to head straight back to Shute Beach and crawl in the window, only I didn't on account of not wanting to be in Praeger's bedroom by myself. Instead I hung out at the edge of the lot with my back up against the fence, so as to not expose myself to a surprise attack.

Few minutes later Praeger ambled over, now with his eyebrows raised.

"You know I got a thing with zombies," I said. Embarrassed a little but not much, since it was Praeger.

"Ain't zombies," he said. "Just come on back."

"Call me when the zombies are gone," I said.

"Can't," sounding exasperated, "since the damn movie stopped when you ran off."

“Son of a bitch,” I said, and Praeger agreed. So I went back with him, and he was right. That hand was still frozen on the screen, just coming out of the ground, only now the image was flickering a little as if the projector lamp was dying.

“Looks busted,” I said, but Praeger just shook his head and sat down, so I sat down too.

And the movie started back up right away.

Maybe Praeger didn’t think it was a zombie movie, but I don’t know what else but a zombie crawls out of a grave like that. Just a kid, younger than me and Praeger even, but still a zombie. Mouth hanging open and face covered in mud, hair matted down with mud, mud in his eyes. Dressed all in a nice suit, though, which I figured made sense, and I wondered why more movie zombies didn’t go around in nice clothes. One of his nice shoes had come off.

My stomach was flopping some but I kept watching. You could see it was a struggle for him to walk, plus his mouth kept falling open and flies were buzzing all around him like he was a hamburger that got dropped on the side of the road. He must’ve walked a couple of miles, dragging his left leg behind him like one of those balls attached to a prisoner’s leg. Trying to breathe, which didn’t make any sense to me, but I thought maybe he just remembered what breathing was like and thought he was supposed to breathe. Anyway the sound gave me the jeebs.

The town he was walking through started looking familiar. Not exactly the same—like for instance, Pemby’s Auto Parts on Washington was called Pendee’s Auto Parts in the movie. But familiar even so. And then the middle school. The cut-through on Henderson. When he walked past Spider Park I turned to Praeger and started to say son of a bitch, but Praeger shushed me and said just keep watching.

He finally made it home, then just stood there in front of the door with the flies buzzing around him, caked in mud, wearing that one shoe, mouth hanging open. Rang the doorbell. Footsteps coming, and I knew who’d be on the other side. She’d scream when she saw her son standing there, and after she screamed she’d collapse on the floor. Then he’d eat her brains without a doubt. I decided I wasn’t going to watch that part, no matter what Praeger said.

Instead the dad opened the door. Tall, thin, with hollowed-out eyes, but a young face, younger and kinder than I expected. He knelt down slow, the way you would with a dog you aren’t quite sure is friendly. And then the zombie boy just sort of lurched forward and fell into his arms. And now the brain eating had to begin, anybody could see that. But the dad only

hugged him close, exposing his vulnerable skull, and the boy hung there in his dad's arms, still trying to breathe, rattling his dead lungs. I realized I was holding my breath.

And then, real slow, the zombie boy began to crumble away. Like sand running out through a busted hourglass. His dad was left kneeling on the floor with his arms wrapped around a pile of clothes and mud. And the screen went white.

For a few seconds Praeger and me didn't move. I looked over and he gave me the eyebrows, and I gave him the eyebrows back.

When we got up, Mr. Leary wasn't in the booth. Praeger shut off the lights and the projector. We walked back to his place and I didn't say a word, since I could tell Praeger was thinking.

"Gonna need a staple gun," he said after awhile, and I said, "Of course."

Next day we sat down in Praeger's basement and made up a hundred flyers. SECRET MIDNIGHT SHOWING AT GRANDFATHER VAMPIRE'S SUPER 130. Below that was a title: "Zombie Boy Returns." Praeger had me draw a little zombie doodle beneath the title on each of the flyers, and by the time we were done I was swearing like mad and couldn't hardly move my hand anymore. We walked outside and the sun hurt our eyes from being tucked away in the basement. In two hours we had the flyers stapled from one end of Westover to the other, and by then it would've been harder to miss those flyers than to find one of them.

Still, only Gus Hargrove and Eddie Pastornicky showed up the first night. Dragged their sleeping bags in through the busted gate and I nodded and handed them bags of stale popcorn while Praeger got things started inside.

Gus looked up at the screen. "What is it," he said.

"Are you gonna ask questions the whole time?" I said. "Damn."

He shrugged.

The movie started up. Praeger and me took our regular positions, and Gus and Eddie found a spot clear of the high weeds and settled in.

Zombie boy came back to life in his dad's arms, reappearing out of the sad little pile of mud and graveclothes right there in the foyer. Which was a nice way to start. I eyed Gus and Eddie to make sure they appreciated it.

His name was Emilio, turned out. Not exactly a classic monster name in my opinion, although Emilio was looking less like a monster tonight anyways. His dad made sure he got cleaned up and dressed in some regular, non-grave clothes, brushed his hair, and made sure he was presentable for his mom. Then they sat together in the kitchen and waited. Mom finally

walked in carrying a vase of flowers, noticed the muddy footsteps and followed the trail to the kitchen. Took one look at zombie boy, at Emilio, and again I was sure she would scream, or at least drop those flowers and the vase would shatter. But she just came to the table and sat down with Emilio and his dad. Put her hand on Emilio's head, Emilio kind of half-smiling on account of not being able to use his face completely just yet, on account of still being halfway dead. And she looked back at the dad, and nodded. Like, Okay, sure, we're doing this thing with Emilio coming back from the dead and whatnot.

Had to teach him pretty much everything all over again. How to walk regular without shuffling like a monster. How to brush his teeth and dress himself. How to talk, which was something that he never seemed to really get a hang of, or maybe he just always was a little quiet, even before being a zombie. I thought that was possible. Donnie was quiet, and took a long time to answer questions sometimes, but I never thought it was because he was slow. Just liked to think about things first, was all.

Movie ended with Emilio's first day back to school. Nervous, holding his backpack, same backpack I had last year with a robot dinosaur on it. Trying not to let his mouth hang open in that zombie way he had. Stepped into the school and kids started looking around, and you could tell things were going to get bad in a hurry. We read Frankenstein last year in Mrs. Leary's class, so I knew everyone was going to turn on Emilio pretty quick now, and then I had to think he would be forced to eat their brains. Only maybe we wouldn't mind so much, watching, since we knew he just wanted to fit in, same as Frankenstein's monster, and why couldn't they just let him alone already.

Only once again things didn't go that way. Kids just came over to Emilio and smiled at him, and shook his hand, and touched his clothes, and tousled his hair. And Emilio smiled back, at least the left half of his mouth did. Tried to say something which came out in a grave-y kind of way, and nobody screamed. One of the teachers came out to see him, and took him by the hand and walked him to class. The sun was coming in through the windows, and it was that same crazy sky out there, and the light shining on Emilio made him look kind of nice, even sitting there with his mouth hanging open a bit. And that's how the movie ended.

By the next night we had a dozen more kids, and Praeger and me had to clear out some of the weeds to make room.

Emilio was back on the playground with the other kids. Building a go-cart with his dad. Having dinner with his parents. Reading books. Still didn't say a whole lot, like Donnie, and sometimes when he was thinking

about something real hard, or when he was alone, he could look kind of sad, kind of lost. Sometimes he opened his closet door and saw his old graveclothes hanging up in there, all cleaned up now. Didn't say anything, just looked at them.

But when he smiled, I swear there was something a little beautiful about him. Almost glowed sometimes, even, when he was happy. When does somebody glow like that? A few times I caught myself leaning forward, smiling, when some other kid would pick up one of Emilio's books that had dropped out of his bag, or hold the door open for him, that kind of thing. Kids aren't always friendly like that. Good things don't always happen like that. But I wanted good things to happen for Emilio, because of how he looked when he was happy. Everybody did. You could see that.

More and more kids started coming to the drive-in, sneaking out after their families had gone to bed. For some reason they stuck around and came back again the next night, and the next. Sometimes things were exciting, like the time Emilio tried to climb up the water tower and fell twenty feet and everybody thought he was dead all over again, for real this time (but he wasn't, broken leg was all, and he got to wear a bright green cast just like Gus had that time a few years back, which made Gus hoot when he saw it). But mostly things were quiet, not all that dramatic. Just a regular kind of life. But kids kept coming to the drive-in to see what would happen next. They were worried when Emilio had to get up to deliver a speech in class. They laughed when Emilio went to the beach with his mom and dad and they all built sand zombies. When Emilio came home one day with a Lhasa Apso puppy, every kid at the drive-in cheered, even Eddie Pastornicky. And every night when the movie ended, we shuffled out through the high weeds and walked like ghosts ourselves through the Westover streets back to our homes, talking a little about what we'd seen, but mostly just quiet, thinking our own private thoughts I guess.

Westover got to be a little strange, come late July. Kids were so tired from the late nights that they slept half the day away, and when they did come outside, the sun was too bright to take. We avoided playgrounds and ball fields, and instead took to gathering in basements, and garages, and other places that didn't get a whole lot of sun. And we'd talk about what we'd all seen the night before at Grandfather Vampire's drive-in.

There was a good deal of speculation. Older kids, the more sophisticated ones, were starting to think something bad was coming. You don't come back from the dead, reasoning went, without some repercussions. Possibilities were discussed. A fire. A car accident. Disease. Sooner or later something was going to send Emilio back to the grave.

I didn't try to guess. Maybe I just didn't care what was supposed to happen anymore. Maybe I just wanted him to grow up, like he was doing, and just be happy.

"But that ain't a movie," Praeger said, when I told him that. We were on our way to the drive-in, one night in late July.

"I don't care," I said.

"Yeah," Praeger said, "I know."

July turned into August. Emilio grew up. He went to high school and tried out for the football team. Didn't make it, not having ever really mastered the hand-eye coordination thing or the running thing, but everybody liked him so much that they made him team president, which I didn't even know was a thing. He wasn't the smartest kid, or the most athletic, or the most anything, really. But he did okay. And as he got older he never got mean. He just stayed good, is I guess what I'm saying. And I was happy, because not everybody stays good.

August wore on. By the middle of the month we had more than a hundred kids camped out every night. I didn't know half of them. They staggered in with their sleeping bags and their lawn chairs and sometimes their stuffed animals too, half asleep, collecting their popcorn and finding an open space wherever they could. Grandfather Vampire sat in the booth and never spoke, and was always gone by the end. Praeger and me watched from our usual spot. Sometimes I'd look over at Praeger and wonder what he was thinking, but he didn't say much.

Emilio graduated high school and joined the military. Fought in some distant place, and saw people around him die. We all had some nervous moments then, but Emilio survived. Won some medals. Came home, only not glowing so much. The town threw a party for him, same way they did with Praeger's older brother Buddy.

He went back to school, to college. Met a girl named Raisa, same as my mom. When they got married they bought a house at the top of Sunset Hill. Adopted a Lhasa Apso and named him Rusty.

And they had a baby, too. Most beautiful baby boy you ever saw, except that he was sick, he was born sick. And everyone knew this was coming, that sooner or later something awful had to happen, kids were looking at each other and shaking their heads.

Baby's name was Donnie.

It was the last week of the summer. Storms were coming in but the rains held up while we watched Emilio and Raisa talk to the doctor, while we saw Donnie get a little older, just old enough to start to be a real kid, with an imagination, just starting to figure out who he was going to

be. We saw the months slip away. Saw Donnie going in for an operation. Saw Emilio leave the hospital one night, and walk back through the town toward the cemetery, the cemetery he'd once been buried in, and kneel down there, with the sun dying behind him. His father was there too, old Grandfather Vampire himself, reaching his old bony hand down to grasp Emilio's shoulder, squeezing it tight.

I got up and walked to the booth, which I knew would be empty. Just stood there, the movie playing behind me.

"Going home," I said to Praeger, and then I left.

* * *

Next night around eleven-thirty, Praeger came by my house and threw something at the window. When I didn't answer he threw something bigger. I said son of a bitch to myself and threw open the window. "I ain't going," I called down. Then I went back to bed.

Some noisy minutes later, Praeger hauled himself over the window sill.

"What the hell," he said, seeing me under the covers.

"Told you I ain't going," I said. "I'm tired, Praeger."

"I need you," he said. "To do the concessions and whatnot."

I rolled over so my back was to him, fairly miserable, and said, "I'm going to sleep."

"It's the finale," he said. "We gotta see what happens. To Emilio. To everybody. All this time? We gotta see."

I didn't say anything.

"So you're going to be a coward, is that it?" he demanded.

Damn Praeger. I sat up and turned to face him. "Everybody dies. There. I just told you the end, you dumbass. Now get out of here."

"How do you know?"

I didn't say anything, just squeezed my eyes shut. When Praeger asked again, I said, "He took everything else. He can't have Donnie."

Praeger didn't have an answer for that. So he just said, real quiet, "But you don't know. What's going to happen, I mean. You don't really know."

"Seen this movie before," I said. And I dropped back down and turned away.

Next thing I knew, Praeger's hands were underneath me and he was lifting me up out of bed. "You're going to see the goddamn finale," he said.

I didn't fight him. I outweigh Praeger by a few pounds, so I was curious to see how far he'd get with me. He made it two steps toward the

window. Then we went down in a heap, Praeger landing underneath me. Knocked the wind out of both of us.

I rolled off him. After we both caught our breath, I said, "What were you going to do when you got to the damn window?"

He shrugged. "Hadn't thought that far ahead," he said.

I sighed and said, "Okay, fine. Let's just go see the damn finale."

* * *

The rains were coming, the end of summer rains that always came to Westover. It was a warm night and the stars were gone and the summer was gone too, but the rains were coming.

The lot at the Super One-Thirty was empty. I looked at Praeger and he shrugged. "So it'll just be us," he said.

I walked into the projectionist's booth with him. Grandfather Vampire wasn't there either, but there was one last reel on the chair where he always sat.

"I'll get it set up quick," Praeger said. "Before the rains come. You go out and sit down."

"Doesn't feel right," I said.

"Go sit down," said Praeger.

I walked out of the booth and sat down. Looked around at the lot for the first time in quite a while. The asphalt had cracked open in a hundred places. Weeds had taken over so much that you could barely see the screen anymore without standing up. Looked as much like a cemetery, that moment, as any place I'd ever been.

The movie started up.

It was different now. Just like a regular home movie, the kind your dad makes with one of those old video recorders. All different scenes of birthdays and band recitals and soccer games and family vacations, all running together one after the other, as if that's all life was, just highlights, one happy celebration after another. Only in these home movies it was Donnie, and it was me, and we were the ones having birthdays, and playing games whenever Donnie wasn't feeling so bad, and going on vacation when Donnie could take some time away from the hospital. Here was Donnie and me running through the sprinklers in the backyard. Here was Donnie holding my hand on his first day of kindergarten, when I kept trying to shrug him off but he wouldn't let go and finally I told myself to hell with it and just let him keep holding it. Here was Donnie holding up a present I'd given him for his seventh birthday, some stupid book I found and I thought he'd love because it was about the pyramids and he was just a nutjob about the pyramids for a

while. Here was the hospital bed, that stupid damn hospital bed. Here was my brother Donnie. Just waving at the camera, and smiling. And I thought, just stop waving, what the hell are you waving for, and there's me, refusing to get in the car, refusing to say goodbye because it's a stupid goddamn thing to say. And then it was over, and the movie ran out, and all that was left was the sound of the reel flapping in the projector, and the wind coming down to sweep through the parking lot before the rains.

I walked back to the booth. Praeger was gone. I found the switch for the projector and turned it off, not bothering to take off the last reel. Looked around one last time, then shut off the lights.

When I walked out I figured it would be too dark to see, but there was some moonlight coming in through the clouds. I thought maybe I would see him. Even though the movie was over, I thought just maybe I would see him.

But the screen was dark. It shimmered like a curtain in the wind. And I just stood and watched it through the high weeds, in the last seconds of the summer, before the rains came.

DENNIS ZARAGOZA

Ephemeral

I want to
remember,

but
I
can't.

Memories
meant for
that moment.

Beautiful
things,

lost

in that
glance, or
that touch,
or those words,
or your smell,
or that kiss, on
my lips.

DENNIS ZARAGOZA

Forgive Me,

Mrs. Salatino,
I'm not
the 6-year old
who walked
in your
door
in 1997.

I've grown.
Still growing.
Did you?

I remember what
Edneyville Elementary
tried to
teach me
about this country.

I'd pledge my
allegiance
to a flag,
heart in hand.

We were
Indivisible.

Now, at 21
I've learned
America's
true colors.

Red
white
and blue
don't
define
Me.

Green isn't
on the flag.
Freedom
isn't
free.
No justice for all.

What *do* you
believe in,
America?

Show me,
don't
tell me.

Forgive me,
Miss Tolar.
I'm not the
10-year
old who walked
out your
door
in 2002.

I'm growing.
Still growing.
Are you?

DENNIS ZARAGOZA

40 Days

It feels like
40 days
in this desert.
 Barren land
 for solemn thoughts.

Deadly path
stained with blood.
A selfless sacrifice
 for redemption.

Deliver me
 Lady Liberty,
 red
 white and
 blue,
 my holy trinity,

Thy will be done,
 but I pray that
 this suffering be
 taken away.

I will carry
the weight of
a nation.

Christ is a Wet-Back,
la Virginsita su madre
y Jehova su padre.

MAME EKBLOM CUDD

Calling Out to Lizzie

It's the day before my surgery, and Da, before tending the cows, says goodbye. He places his hand on my head, then his cheek too, his breath slow and calming to me.

Last night I heard them, my parents, in the front room, their speech all low and whispery, worried about my sixth surgery to repair my cleft palate, for clear speech finally, maybe. My cousin Anne, down the road in Killybegs, she got the harelip too. A little scar, a fine white line is all she has, but her speech is clear.

Mrs. Mulrany's great-aunt, visiting for the first time, popped in yesterday and asked my mum, "Your Fiona, is she a bit deaf as well?" I do sound like that. The words floating, my tongue loose in my mouth, not touching the roof, not well enough for clear speech. I stay silent at school and silent with the boy I like, Thomas.

So many hospital visits and just this past July, the doctor saying, with a probe in my mouth, pointing, showing, "You see this extreme deformity here," and my parents never using "extreme deformity" with me or anyone. We all sat straight in our chairs as those words flew around the room, hitting us.

And afterwards silence in the car, my mum reaching her hand back between the seats to hold my hand for a while. We left the windows rolled down so Da could smoke and those horrible words could be peeled away and tossed out into the sea air.

Today we drive back to the children's hospital in Limerick for a better palate, advancements Da says we should not ignore. Only Mum and I are going. Da will stay back with Connie and Michael and Lizzie.

Lizzie, my little sister, jumps behind me on the bed as I pack. My talker, my kitten, she's small and quick, affectionate, so physical. She'll curl up in my lap, or Da's or Mum's. Whispery she will talk and then, dancing almost, she'll spin over to the visitors in our kitchen, speaking for me, answering, laughing with Thomas as well. Reading now she can, the notes on the little chalkboard Mum gave me. Always there's a giggle as I write more and more complicated words and she says them perfectly, explaining. She takes me in good humor or not. She runs with me, keeping up almost as fast to tend to the cows, to bring them down to the second pasture. And she knows the whistles, directing them through the little gate near the stream.

“You’re a big help to your sister, you are, Lizzie Keneally,” Mr. Mulrany said yesterday, catching us on the road with the cows, asking again of the surgery and Lizzie answering, cuddling against me, but her speech clear and sounding much older than any child of eight.

We walked home through the tall, wet grass, waving to Mr. Mulrany, with me thinking of Lizzie’s childish actions, her movements and giggles. Yet she speaks clearly to them, to our neighbors and friends, and then she hides behind me as if I’m the one who spoke. So well done it is, when they answer, they look to my eyes. Sixteen in a month I am. I should speak, I hope, better, and I shall have to leave Lizzie alone soon too. She must speak for herself.

We sit in the kitchen, still in the dark, and Mum makes the tea before we leave. Connie and Michael have gone out to help Da. Lizzie, she picks up the chalkboard and climbs onto my lap. When I get home I want to call out her name, nice and clear, and hear it she will, all the way from the second pasture.

DAVID ADÈS

Your Move

Strange game, this: me king, you queen
and all those pawns in between.
You've had me in your sights, I can tell
since the moment my true queen fell.
And why does a king have so little power
that he must wait, passive, for his final hour —
not taking charge or exerting will
but standing frozen, subdued, still?

I am a king, not some mock effigy
though I don't care much now for strategy
and my heart is wounded, weeping, sore.
Hurry up! What are you waiting for?
This is no way to meet my fate
so come on, don't check, let's mate.

JEAN BERRETT

November Evening

The November evening drops like gray water
through the leafless trees
and the skinny treetops shine, stunned
by sunset.

This is the hour I hold most tight.
Reminders of childhood when
all of us huddled around the 4-foot-tall radio,
sitting on kitchen chairs,
as we listened to Amos and Andy.

My father would laugh and say “Listen to that!”
My mother would sit, head bowed, hands folded in her lap.
None of us knew then the terrible future.

We sat and held our childishness close
breathing in and out the inviolable air
that assured us we would never die.

It was only my mother whose eyes turned away,
dispassionate and saddened.

ALLEN BRADEN

Parable of the Lick

Where the blocks of salt are frozen
together and sculpted by a thousand
tongues, he breathes *deer*. Lure forgotten

by some woodsman. He knows
why it glitters like pond ice
in the twilight. An hour from now

he will think on this and stir his fire
so the ashes rise then fall to catch light
again in a gesture like a prayer

cast not by him for all wild animals,
no, nothing like that. Other supplications
of transformation. *The body to soul,*

wood to fire, blood to salt, deer to meat,
where the dark birth of the moon,
a hunter's moon, cleaves the night.

BARBARA BROOKS

Oak Leaf

I didn't get there in time for Dad's surgery.
Drove along the interstate watching
winter oak leaves hang on in the wind.
The next day, he was pretty out of it on morphine;
thought my brother had killed himself
and that it was WWII.
I tried to orient him. Watched the therapists
put him in a chair. I knew he
would never walk again.

We have been trying to call you.
I had been in the shower.
You need to come now.
Decisions have to be made.

He was on maximum blood pressure meds,
on a breathing machine sucking for air,
he looked like he was hurting.

Dad has a living will.
My brother is 10 hours away,
let me call him. Then please turn the drugs
and breathing machine off.

His breathing remained regular
and blood pressure low,
I didn't think he would last long.
Told him it was okay to leave.

He hung there in the wind
until my brother came.
Then his breathing got irregular,
his pressure lower, and he let go.

SHELLY DRANCIK

Division

My eighty-nine year old father, a widower, has gathered his children around my parents' antique coffee table. My sister and I sit on the floral divan; my twin brothers sit opposite of one another on matching wing-backed chairs. Time has caused them to age exceedingly different from one another. All of us have grown children of our own.

Our father stands at one end of the table. A glass top sits within the perimeter of maple, one of the strongest of woods. It is the table my mother and father brought with them from Hungary, after the war. A wedding gift when they were not quite twenty years old. They paid more than they could afford to ship the table to America; this, they told us countless times.

Below the thick glass are intricate carvings in the wood, once part of a church door, they told us. As a child, I ran my fingers along the cool glass writing out the letters of my name: Sylvia, first printed, then in cursive. Our house was always kept at a low temperature.

My father says, "This is for you, children," and nods toward the table.

A manic green, my father's eyes travel to each of our faces. His lips, a painted line. He reaches under the table and lifts up the hammer he keeps under the kitchen sink.

After my mother's death, arguments over their European possessions—an Austrian crystal bowl; an ivory table linen, hand-sewn, perfectly preserved; a blue metal canister that held her father's military papers—create this moment.

At the sound of broken glass, I remember the sound of broken ice on the pond where we used to skate as children. My siblings and I leap back in our seats, our expressions like sculpted stone.

The glass fissures race, like we did on the ice, from the center of the pond to its far corners.

BILL BROWN

Savor

We have a soul at times...

—Wistawa Szymborska

Which means at times we don't.
We weave our lives at times;
at times our lives are woven
for us.

Not woolen threads as our mothers
might have it, or cotton, but rayon, unborn
electric, sticking to our flesh like August.

Not August gold with drought-burned
corn, but glass and concrete August
angling the sky away from grass and bone.

At times a soul claims us
like a lake claims the moon,
wobbles it, stretches it
like God's lamp

lighting our names
toward home—my father's supper whistle
that brought us racing behind our spaniel
wags—the smell of fresh soup
permeating the back porch like marrow.

We knew even then
the delight
that hunger makes when sated,
how the soul chooses hunger
over plenty

because plenty has
so little to follow, and our bread
sopped the last rich savor before
we pled for more.

JOHN F. BUCKLEY

The Anxiety of Influence

Nobody's parents have loved him enough,
and everyone's mommy has struggled with cancer,
and anyone's daddy's addicted to ponies or beatings or booze.
So what is it that you bring fresh to the table?
And what can you ever bring new to the table?

Each couple's romance has ended in heartbreak,
and any past lover has frozen and faded,
and everyone's theme song's a cocktail of fury and torment and blues.
So what is it that you bring fresh to the table?
And what can you ever bring new to the table?

For every occurrence, you can write a bleak sonnet
as you wallow, reflect, and write stanzas upon it.
You can scribble sestinas or pantoums or maybe a pithy haiku.
But the chimes of your poems, the best of your verse
will still ring like echoes, the plagiarized worst
of the lives of the millions of poets existing and writing like you.

Everyone's work life is pallid and boring,
and nobody's uncle has left them with millions,
and anyone happy in their job is soulless and venal and cruel.
So what is it that you bring fresh to the table?
And what can you ever bring new to the table?

Nature is lovely and nature is savage,
and anomie thrives within modern society,
and everyone feels like a god and a fraud and too often a fool.
So what is it that you bring fresh to the table?
And what can you ever bring new to the table?

SHARON CHARDE

Incandescence

I've failed to die again, uncured of desire
or vanity, despite throngs of wrong
directions. The via dolorosa a dead end
street, I've turned around, taken a left,
then another, now a right. My husband
always says if you want to be found, stay
where you are, but I keep going, only
just learning how not to save love but
to spend it. I'll tell you a story with my body
if you listen. There's a Romanian proverb
that says the tree won't grow if you don't
pick the apples. A woman in the next room
hums a song from the sixties, I want
her to come in and eat the fruit, tell me
whether our souls are thick or thin. I'll
show her my bruises, the beautiful
light at both ends of the candle.

TOBI COGSWELL

Those Delicate Things

for Grandma Ida

I open my window and sniff.
They are making grilled cheese sandwiches
next door. My nose crinkles. I remember
being in your kitchen while you made
me a toastite, grilled on both sides
on the same burner you used to light
your cigarettes.

And then you washed my plate
in the same sink where you
used to wash my hair, me laying
on the ironing board, my head
tilted under the faucet from 1942,
while you told me stories from when
you were young, it wasn't so hard
and Grandpa was still alive.

We did not talk about him often.
You did not talk about him often.
Forty-three years is a long time
to be alone with your children,
the Dodgers playing on the radio.

It is from you I learned to sleep
with the TV on. I understand it
because I do it today. It is from you
I learned Yiddish, only good words.

Everything for your children,
it has not been an easy life.
No one has given you roses for years
and you deserve dozens.

KATHERINE ANN DAVIS

Inscription in A Farewell to Arms

My feeling is nothing
like what Elizabeth must have felt
on Valentine's Day, 2003,
unwrapping Hemingway.
Only two dollars, plus shipping,
now the book —
with all my love, Dave —
is in my hands, out of hers.

Was it the lovers' separation
that drew him to it, or their bliss
before the season ended soundly
with the woman's death?
Perhaps Dave believed, as many do,
that true beauty lies in transience.
I hope that when Elizabeth
threw the book fast, like an insult,
he was there to catch it.

My lover gives me collections
of other people's correspondence
wrapped in newspaper.
Inside the covers are love-notes,
written on postcards
from places I've never been.
I stack them next to the bed
and trace his letter-shapes,
sliding my fingernail
along the ruts he creates.

JAMES A. JORDAN

The Cellist's Lover

T.C. Cole knows something is wrong between him and Diana. A man can tell when a problem rears its ugly head, but what that is he just can't seem to put his finger on. He's got his theory—another man—but who? He eliminated most of the boys in his class right off, and from there he's kept whittling it down. The Kemp twins couldn't be because they're sweet on a pair of modeling sisters from Goodlettsville; Frank Cowher has sworn off women for a year; and Jimmy Cooper, who he'd suspected the most, has been hooking up with the Key girl every weekend out at The Field. Besides he's found her initials scribbled across pages of history notes with a new letter for her last name—S—which none of theirs starts with. Sure, it could be the future. She's gotten the acceptance letter from some school up north, her dream school, and there's nothing going to keep her from leaving. But when she showed him the letter, her face stretched cartoon-like because of the smile, he didn't say the wrong thing. He'd wanted to say well shit. He'd wanted to say what does this mean for us? He'd been good though. He'd said, "I knew they'd take you." He'd said, "It's foolishness not to go." That happened when things were still good, too. Can't be that. Couldn't be.

Late May in the country. T.C. leans against the side of the brick church wishing he had a stronger drink in his hands. A bottle of whiskey or tequila, neither of which he's tasted, instead of a Coca-Cola he's dropped a couple of Lifesaver mints in. This is something he's done for years—adding the mints. At first, it was a race to see whether or not he could get the cap back on before fizz rushed geyser-like from the bottle. Also the power he felt in his hands, trapped carbonation causing the bottle to rumble a little. He'd imagined it was similar to holding an explosive—not a firecracker, but some grenade—except this had more risk to it. Each time held the uncertainty of disaster. He might be off by a second or two, drenching himself along with any bystanders (people, trees, tables) in cold sticky syrup. Which happened a few times early on. Never anymore now that he's mastered it. It's ceased to get his adrenaline pumping. Just habit. He knows down to the second (three) how long he has to screw the cap on, and how to let air escape in small puffs, without making a bubble. He doesn't even much care for the taste of mint.

Because Anderson Place High's gymnasium got hit bad by the tornado back in March—the day after she got the acceptance letter, which he

did not point out—the Baptist church down the street has offered to sponsor all end of the year festivities. This has included sports banquets, the musical, and now the band and choral concerts, which have been condensed into one night. Tonight. He’s promised Diana to come, even though his brother is pitching in the opening round of the State Championship over in Chattanooga. Even though his face has been red for weeks since things have gone sour and fighting’s all they seem to do, but he’s here. Early. Watching the different sets of families file in the front door. The first to show are the overachievers’ parents who are way too overdressed for the occasion, tuxedo suits and evening dresses that maybe people wore for nights out in Nashville a hundred years ago. Then the average Joes: they’ve donned polo shirts and khakis. The poor families, per usual, bring up the rear, in the same clothes they’ve worn to every other function, and a sour odor hovers around them. Some smile, most ignore him. He just bobs his head at a few, shifting weight from foot to foot. The din of countless conversations pours out of the open sanctuary windows (the A/C busted on the last night of the musical). Everyone talks at the same time making it impossible to pick out her voice.

The chorale director welcomes the crowd, apologizing for the heat and thanking the church, the boosters, the parents, the principal, her hairdresser, for support and donations. She steps over her words and stutters, managing to spit out that the night will be in two acts. The first being the chorus followed by the band. This year the chorus has specialized in “Oldies but Goodies” which is tonight’s theme by the way. They tried to get Smokey to come join, but he had to decline (a few guffaws). This year’s group became fascinated with the music of what they’ve termed the Stone Age, of your—the parents’—time (fewer laughs, and audible shifting in seats). So if any of these songs want to make you get up and boogie by all means, shake them hips! And without further ado let’s get this party started! An out of time “My Girl” leads the way. T.C. does not move, watching the sunset over the shed, the cemetery.

Six months ago they stood in the downstairs bathroom of her mother’s house, naked, taking in every mirror-reflecting inch of the other’s body. It was the first time she’d been naked in front of anyone, Diana’d told him that while trying to hide behind him. Grabbing her at the hips he’d positioned her in front, the mirror filling up with her, before running his fingers up and down her body, smothering words like *beautiful* and *majestic* into her neck. And he’d seen the way she stared at him in the mirror, that look of expressive calm overtaking her face—the eyebrows rising and descending, eyes shooting open, and closed—as his fingers slid over the trimmed patch of hair between her legs. How she’d opened herself up for him. He hadn’t known quite what to do;

it was his first time, too, which of course he couldn't tell her. His first time to display his body to another, his first time to have another's hands run over him. When it had ended they had wrapped themselves around one another so tight heat was trapped between them, and she'd asked how she'd done. Very good. His best yet for sure.

The brick cooks his back. He's emptied the coke and punts it at a baby blue pickup parked twenty yards away. It bounces off the cab. What happened to all of that? What had happened to nights like that? The magic of touch? It belongs to another lifetime. He's seen enough movies to know when someone is being played, relegated to stand-in status, which is how it's been for at least a month. Little more than a substitute. One night there they were in the bathroom again staring at their reflections, at least that's what he was doing. He'd been doing his best imitation of a Cary Grant embrace, and the whole time her eyes had a glazed over, indifferent look. Then, when she did touch him, what had her hands done? Well they'd grabbed him in weird places—the left moving up and down the nape of his neck, pressure alternating between different sets of fingers; and the right sliding long, lazy strokes across his back. She'd hummed some tune the whole time—not their song—a song he'd never heard before. It would speed up and slow down at the wrong moments. It's when he'd realized she was and wasn't there, that her mind had gone off somewhere else. It's when he'd started suspecting someone new, when he'd begun to investigate. All he'd managed to find were those scribbled initials, that mysterious S, so he confronted her. "Who else could I even be seeing?" she'd said, "I'm with you or rehearsing all of the time." Which was true, but it didn't assuage his doubts.

The chorus's last number "When I Fall In Love" ends in confusion. Having forgotten the lyrics each member substitutes words about their own forever loves, and the smattering of applause is followed by a roundabout apology from the director ("We just started working on that one this week."). T.C. moves from the wall. His arms have brick lines singed into them. The vestibule's low lights temporarily blind him. He bumps into the makeshift concession table, sending bags of chips and saran-wrapped cookies flying. There is plenty of room on the first floor, but still he heads up to the balcony where scattered middle-schoolers, younger siblings dragged along, have coupled off and practice slobbering on one another. The band teacher approaches the stage, his students following single file behind him. For a time T.C. had convinced himself it had to be the band teacher. That she'd fallen into one of those love affairs with teachers (they'd just watched *Mr. Holland's Opus*), but during his investigating he's witnessed on multiple occasions (through the storm windows that line the top of the music office) the band and

chorus teachers touching each other up. Also his last name doesn't start with S. It's King.

For thirty minutes the band plays through its repertoire. They have taken the oldies theme to mean sixteen and seventeen hundreds, but they are good. Light years better than the chorus. When they leave the stage, applause lasts at least half a minute. The band teacher turns to the audience, bows, before launching into his speech. This has been his best year at the school, and he's been fortunate to have the most talented group of musicians this year. Some people say that every year, but not him. He really means it. This is due in large part to the outstanding leadership of the senior class, one person in particular. Miss Diana Rawls. Without her, he says, the thought of putting together a string quartet would have been just that. A thought. The last four years have been a true reward working with a, well there's no other word for it, a genuine talent. Someone who has a real passion and dedication to her instrument. A rare trait to find in a person so young. And he's so proud that she's decided to continue her studies. One day, he's certain, you'll read her name on one of the Big Five's rosters. He, in connection with the band boosters, has already given her a parting gift, putting the scholarship money she does not need (because of her full ride, did he mention her full ride?) towards this gift—a new Stradivarius! Which she's been using for the last month now. And tonight it is his pleasure to welcome to the stage for the last time as a high school student, Miss Diana Rawls, who will perform Bach's *Cello Suite In G*.

The audience applauds as she mounts the stage and hugs her teacher, and then goes silent when she sits. A lone spotlight settles on her, causing all of the middle school boys to stare, lips breaking away from their brace-faced girls. She wears a black dress with a sequined strap wrapped around her neck, and no bra (he can tell, he can see the outline of her hard nipples through the fabric). In the light, her skin looks drinkable, a glass of milk. There is a nervous, shy look on her face as she sets the cello up, wrapping her legs around it. With the first sound of bow on string, her face changes. Eyebrows begin to move up and down, eyes fidgeting open and closed. Even though he's only seen reflections of it before it doesn't take him long to figure it out. To realize what's going on here. Her arms move over the instrument she's entwined, become one with. Legs pump against its curves and it slides up and down, side to side. Her muscles tensing, relaxing. There's the tune again—that alien tune she's started humming—rising up from those vibrating strings the bow in her hand commands. It circles his head, forcing its way down his throat. His own pulse rising, a quickening pace. Her face is a deep red, not a blush, but encompassed in heat, passion. Sweat forming at her widow's peak.

He swears he can smell her from here—that familiar odor. How much longer must this go on?

At the end she lets out a gasping moan, slaps the side of the Stradivarius (fingers sliding down) and raises the bow straight up, music vanishing into the air. The audience erupts, shouting cheers as they all rise in a single movement. The balcony itself shakes now, as if the energy from the stage searches for a way out of the church. As if the church is too small to encompass all of this passion. He is frozen, stuck in his seat, blood pumping so loud in his ears he can hear nothing but the offbeat staccato rhythms of his heart. And the smell of it everywhere. The smell of oiled wood. “Goddamn,” he says to the empty row in front of him, “Goddamn that bastard.”

DIANE DECILLIS

Room Full of Children Staring at Me

1-

The Vietnamese manicurist
asks me how many children I have.
She must think I'm God or Buddha,
able to answer what is unknowable.

2-

I never stop wondering what it would have been
like to connect with the searching eyes of infant,
to find some version of myself in them.
Some days it's endless speculation, other
days, simple as the girl who wasn't there
when they handed out the word mother.

3-

It's a mystery, a dime novel.
I'm the heroine who's travelled
to a remote island in search of
the stolen formula sealed in a vault
inside an unmarked catacomb.
My flashlight works, but oh clever villain,
just as I uncoil the delicate parchment,
alas, the disappearing ink.

4-

There it is, the age you don't recognize,
time of ripe fruit falling—when the body
can no longer wait for the heart to catch up.

5-

How many ways are there
to ruin a child? Tie them to you,
teach them to trust only your words,

speak your thoughts. Abandon them,
 give them too much freedom,
 make it hard to follow the long
 scent home. Lie. Not the good
 lies but the ones that keep them
 from themselves. Train them
 to be the little parents until
 they're tired and weary
 of having to mother again.

6-

The word for a woman who bears a child is mother.
What is the word for a woman who does not?

WILLIAM DORESKI

Condolences Offer Themselves

Though some have been dead for years
old friends munching hot dogs and chips
look sturdy as woven starlight.

The kitchen hums with unearthly tunes.
Stanzas clash in grandeur. I doze
as my computer spews messages

from disintegrated moments spent
making love in the roar of insects
on bulbous summer nights. I wake

and pour glasses of Shipyard Ale
for my friends, who nod and munch
in silence. Back to sleep I dream

that condolences offer themselves
to earthquake victims in Paris,
Madrid, and Singapore. Pages

flap and certain words escape:
carrion, rumble, detour, feint.
Often I've attempted to tie

these very words to a railroad track
so that a long passing freight train
might properly discipline them.

But they've always wriggled free.
My friends would understand but
they're focused on hot dogs smeared

with that grainy deli-style mustard
and the sweet relish I recall
from family picnics sixty years past.

A violet light smuts the kitchen
and casts shadows dense as porcelain.
I'm awake again and eager

to share my heartbreak with friends,
but they've moved on, leaving crumbs,
and the chairs they filled are cold.

ELIZABETH DREWRY

Despair

In another century, another place,
I would take my vapors to my room,
sniff laudanum in a lace hanky,
retire to a fainting couch. Or
languish in Bedlam,
wild-haired, lice-infested.

But I am here, in the mix and measure
of drugs speeding me, slowing me,
as if I traveled a rickety bridge
that ices before the road.

I sprawl on the bed, chenille popcorning
my face. My limbs sink, too leaden
for a walk. The hop clover
I would have seen, the breeze on my skin,
disappear into a dark-matter void.

I count myself lucky in despair,
my other form of madness being anguish
that agitates and agitates beyond bearing.
I have ranted and screamed
like Bosch's creatures, perpetually
tormented by bird-headed devils.

In another life, I am a rag bundle
crouching on city grates, filthy
cardboard sign scrawled
The End of the World.

KATHRYN BRIGHT GURKIN

Whatever Became of Jennings Carter?

I go to my search engine, Google, and type in his name. In all of the United States three names are found, one in Illinois, one in Alabama and one in Wichita, Kansas. All have addresses and phone numbers, two have middle initials. I never knew whether he had a middle name. I probably never spoke to him at all.

With a name like Jennings Carter you would suppose he came from one of the First Families of Virginia, the kind of people who give their sons surnames for first names to advertise the bloodlines and the breeding of such families as the Masons and the Carters and the Jeffersons and Washingtons. No, Jennings was a poor white boy of eight or nine with a face that might have been by Botticelli and a forelock of lank dark hair that fell over his eyes unless he brushed it back continually. Stooped down beside a front room window, I spied on him as he swung slowly on the old rope swing that dangled from the huge pecan tree near the wash house while his father plowed or his mother helped with the hog killing.

I might have been a year older. He was taller and I don't think he even knew of my existence. Certainly he never knew I spied on him and thought him beautiful. No matter what the fairy stories say, the princess never falls in love with beggar boys, nor is she allowed to talk to them. But there I crouched in the cold bedroom watching a boy in ragged overalls swing on our swing and my heart was nearly bursting with the beauty of him and the hopelessness of ever telling him that he was beautiful.

Tenant farmers were so transient in those days that one family might move from farm to farm each year. They worked for a percentage of the net income from the cash crop, tobacco, and until the crop was sold they had no income at all except what they might borrow against the harvest from the landlord. So Mr. Carter and his family lived in one of the tenant houses on our farm and suffered the indignities of poverty that made it quite impossible for me to speak to Jennings Carter except for a polite Hello! should our paths cross outdoors.

The gulf between us was so wide and deep that seventy years later I still ponder the mystery of Jennings Carter as one of those things that I will never know. Was he bright, athletic? I don't think so. He was too thin and somehow unenergetic as he pumped the swing only enough to make

a shallow arc. There is something about the poor that makes them seem apologetic in the presence of those who have so much more. Even children sense the gulf between them if one is richer than the other. When questioned about these puzzling inequalities, my parents answered with such pointless explanations as “Circumstances alter cases” and “Because I say so.”

World War II was over and farming was becoming mechanized. Tobacco growers still depended on hand labor, though, for planting and harvesting. Where three or four tenant families had been required before the war, only two were needed in the late 1940s. Various “hands” could be hired for the harvest season, women and children mostly, but strong men who could be depended on because they had a stake in the harvest were required for field work and hanging the heavy wood sticks strung with green tobacco high up in the curing barns. There was nothing romantic about tobacco farming, I assure you. It was hard, hot, draining work from which not even the farmer’s daughters were excused.

Jennings Carter must have worked alongside the men in the fields that summer because I have no memory of him hanging about the barns. And I would surely have noticed if he had been in sight. Perhaps he drove the mules or smaller tractor—not the big FarmAll—pulling the heavy wheeled drays from field to barn. The drays with iron-bound wheels and heavy metal axles were unstable and likely to tip over but my family considered them superior somehow to the lowly drag which ran on wooden runners like a sled, keeping the center of gravity low and making it virtually impossible to tip over or get stuck in mud or sand.

Mine was a proud and landed family, having held at one time hundreds—perhaps thousands—of acres of prime farmland and woodland by patent from one or another of the English kings named George. A great iron safe stood in the blue bedroom guarding ancient parchments with their fading ink and royal seals as proof of ownership of royal land grants from the days of colonial America. Over the centuries, with the help of slaves and mules, enough land had been cleared to have insured our fortunes had not so many ancestors sold it off in bits and pieces until nothing was left but the home farm, and that almost went in a bad year when the cotton sold for three cents a pound. The income couldn’t even pay the taxes, so my indomitable grandmother, the eldest daughter of a venerable family herself, literally saved the farm by going to her father for the money. From then until her death it was her signature alone that could convey land and currency or contract for debts. As the eldest of my generation, the mantle of privilege fell upon my shoulders and I felt it as a heavy burden when I looked at Jennings Carter on the swing.

At the end of that growing season Jennings and the other Carters moved away. Nobody told me where they'd gone and if I'd asked, they might have laughed at me or said one of their incomprehensible maxims or been disturbed that I had noticed the poor boy who'd moved like a shadow about the place that year. So the memory of his face is sealed up in my mind like a pearl in an oyster, a tiny treasure from a time and place that held so little of beauty or happiness for some.

In the autumn I'll be eighty. My memory is sound, my aging intellect computer literate, and I have found evidence that three men named Jennings Carter live in various states. I know that does not prove the boy is still alive and living in Alabama, Illinois or Kansas. Knowing what I know about the life expectancy of poor farm children from that time, I doubt that Jennings Carter made it to adulthood. If he did, he probably perished in an Asian war or died young from any of the dread diseases that still plague the poor and uninsured in rich America.

But if he is alive I'd like for him to know that someone keeps the memory of his face as a benchmark by which to measure beauty in all other faces that she meets. I have no intention of trying to find him or to talk to him. I only want to say how much he mattered to someone who judges all the beauties of the world by his young face. It is enough to have been given a glimpse of beauty while I was so young that all that I could do was gaze and gaze.

JESSE GRAVES

Listening at Dusk

So much enthusiasm among the jays,
Mocking one another, mocked in turn
By shrill notes of the peepers,
Governance of the pond rim,
Socialization among the boughs,
So hard to mark the difference
Between camaraderie and furor,
Daring, embattled diplomacy of the air,
Evening aflight on wings of messengers.

JESSE GRAVES

Stray

He stood by the crumbling edge of the road,
As though he'd cut straight through the ditch
If he didn't like the sight of us, my daughter and me.
He was so tall, that from the first distances,
I thought, *the goat's loose, better take a stick.*
That stick caught his eye, but he just hunched down,
Squinting and grinning and twisting his middle,
Not yet wagging his tail, but not scared off either.
What kind of dog is he? Chloe asked.
Part hound, part giraffe, I said, and to myself thought,
Bottomless pit, wellspring of fleas, slobber machine.
With me, he held back, but when Chloe stepped in front,
He squirmed with joy, and followed us home,
Where the other dogs whipped him for an hour,
Until his meek cheerfulness broke their fighting spirits.
What to do when the open road brings in a stray,
Wanderer from some hungry past, some unwanted origin?
What to say when your only child makes a friend?
The dog hangs at the edges of the yard; when she moves,
He moves, at home within the snap of her fingers.

In the Aftermath

50

CAROL HAMILTON

You Hand Me a Seashell

Like a Greek pastry,
it has thin layers
waving at the edges
just as sea weed does,
but stilled now,
and inside,
the silky white skin
is thumbprinted
with a purple rainbow,
perhaps a bed
for the creature
who once lived here,
a halo for life in the wordless sea.

PATRICIA L. HAMILTON

To a Friend in a Dark Time

Forswear your PJs. If you must, pretend
an angel might ring the doorbell.
You never know. Fix yourself an egg,
then dress it up: a sprig of parsley,
a sprinkle of chives. Eat it on your porch.
Watching the morning shadows recede
will do you good. Before the sun
arcs too high, take a walk. Focus
on discovering flowers blooming singly
or jostling together in riotous crowds. Study
their joyful expressions. Gaze with them
at the clouds lolling in the sky, carefree.
Unball your fists as you are able.
When you get home, let the shower spray
stream down your face, a cleansing flow.
Then take a drive. Yes, gas costs more
than it used to, but still, what a bargain.
Explore a road you've never ventured
down. Admire old trees, their trunks
weathered, their branches flourishing,
having been pruned many times. Switch on
the radio, but never listen to sad songs
or that inner voice crying "why?"
The answer will not be clear for years,
if ever. Instead, seek out the best cup of coffee
you can find. Breathe in its aroma and savor
its deep consolation, with or without cream.
Find an alternate route home. Listen
to the weeds poking up from cracks
in the sidewalk. They offer hard-won wisdom.
Permit yourself a detour. If we've learned
any lesson from decades of watching Linus
and Charlie Brown at Christmas, it's that
a scraggly pink-and-white-striped petunia

needs only fresh potting soil, some room
to spread its roots, and a little love. Buy it.
Plant it. Afterwards, enjoy a glass of lemonade--
the best thing lemons offer--and choose
one small thing, just one, to do for someone else.
Let it wholly engross the rest of the afternoon:
writing a letter, stirring up a batch of brownies,
filling a sack with sun-ripened tomatoes, anything
to remind you: you are not alone; you are connected
by a thousand invisible threads to everything
around you and everyone you love. Once
your very bones can submit to this knowledge
and rejoice, however briefly, you may
put your feet up and relax, the reward
for a hard day's work bravely done.

CHAD HANSON

It's for You

In a coffee house, adjacent to a bookstore in Boulder, Colorado, an elderly man talks on a phone with a level of assertion high enough to alarm the patrons. "I want you to e-mail the governor. If he thinks we can take another budget cut he's mistaken. We can start over. I am trying to help you. Can you let somebody help you? Are you capable of that? My van has been stalled in the canyon since I gave my keys to Jennifer." He sets the phone on a shelf and disappears behind a stack of books. A woman at the next table sees that the phone is made of rubber. She turns to her husband. Then she nods toward the phone, and she says, "Fisher-Price." They roll their eyes. They take bites of a sticky bun. They forget about the kook with the play phone, and then it rings.

KENDALL KLYM

The Continental

Beautiful music . . . Dangerous rhythm . . .

It's something daring, The Continental, a way of dancing that's really "entre nous."

It's very subtle, The Continental, because it does what you want it to do.

—Con Conrad, music

—Herb Magidson, lyrics

Millie dips her fork in the soup and swirls it around, as if she's gathering spaghetti. Coming up empty, she gazes at Harmon, her eyes sinking into the wrinkles in her cheeks.

Harmon hands her a spoon. "Try this."

He worries that his words sound sarcastic, that some part of Millie will take offense.

Millie drops the utensil—plink—into the soup.

Letting out a sigh, Harmon retrieves the spoon, wipes it off, and urges his wife to eat.

Millie begins to bounce. "Hash browns! My hash browns!"

Betty Lynn waves to Millie, as she takes an order on the opposite side of the diner. "Be right with you, Hon."

Harmon reaches across the table and rubs his wife's shoulders. When she stops bouncing, he hands her the spoon. She eats.

When the hash browns arrive, Millie pokes them with her fork. As usual, they land on the floor. Betty Lynn picks up the food. She doesn't charge them for what's fallen. She never does. Harmon gives her a thirty-percent tip, and the waitress escorts the couple to their car.

"See you tomorrow," says Betty Lynn.

"You bet," says Harmon.

Millie waves.

Millie and Harmon have eaten at the diner for seventeen years. Neither have cholesterol or heart problems, but they watch their diets, which isn't easy to do at a place called The Grease in the Pan. Chosen because of its name, the restaurant has become a way of life for the couple, especially during Millie's illness.

"Intriguing and refreshingly frank," she had said, when they first drove by. "Only in the South."

On their first visit to the restaurant, they were greeted by a long map of the Appalachian Trail, along with a list of names of locals who had hiked the seventy-five miles it ambles through the state of Georgia. By the summer of their second year of retirement, their names were on the list. When their granddaughter Brianna came to stay, they took her to The Grease in the Pan. Brianna ordered hash browns, which she couldn't finish, and Millie asked for a box. When Harmon hit a bump in the road, the potatoes popped out of the Styrofoam and slid under the passenger seat.

"My hash browns!" cried Brianna." My hash browns!"

Millie consoled Brianna, Harmon cleaned the grease stains, and the matter was dropped. The brain is a strange being, Harmon has begun to realize. Even in the midst of disease, it clings to the oddest things. Millie and Brianna have the same pug nose.

Last fall, when Harmon and Millie drove up to Massachusetts, Millie mistook Brianna for Julie, their daughter. In February, when Julie and Brianna stopped in on their way to Sarasota, Millie failed to recognize either one. Of course Julie overreacted and never made it to Florida. Instead, she made a nuisance at the doctor's, cooked enough food to last a month, and cried on her father's shoulder. Harmon wishes she would get remarried.

* * *

When not attending to his wife, Harmon spends a good deal of time on the Internet. He's a member of an Alzheimer's online support group and sells old-time radio parts on eBay. At eighty-two, he drives and doesn't need glasses. At five-foot-seven, he still has a thirty-inch waist. Every afternoon he takes a half-mile walk while Millie sleeps. Wearing his pedometer, he goes from the living room to the kitchen to the bedrooms and back—360 times. Before Millie got sick, the two had hiked the North Georgia foothills at least once a week. During his indoor walks, Harmon thinks of ways to make his wife happy. The doctors don't know how much longer she'll be able to recognize him, and he wants to make the best of it. Lately, he's been playing old records. Sometimes, when the birds are singing, Millie wants the music turned off. Some songs she hates one day and then loves the next. Last Tuesday, she called Bing Crosby "the Devil." On Wednesday, she listened to *White Christmas* thirty-two times. Harmon has worn a path in the carpet during his walks.

If Millie's awake and the phone rings, Harmon encourages her to answer. As long as his wife knows how to say, "Hello," he's satisfied. Her voice sounds like that of a little girl with laryngitis—a child who knows how

to scream with delight as she rides down the slide, not an octogenarian, who smoked for a decade before giving birth. She can still say the phrase *fine, thank you*, and takes great pleasure in doing it. Harmon is convinced that as long as she stays happy, her condition deteriorates at a slower pace. Since they got on the no-call list, the phone has been mostly silent. Millie's sister used to call from Tallahassee, but now she's got Alzheimer's, too.

Halfway into Harmon's walk, the phone rings. He picks up the extension just as Millie answers. The line is silent, except for a sigh followed by a loud swallow. He knows who it is, even without Caller ID.

"Julie," says Harmon. "What's wrong?"

His daughter sighs again. "I've got a mother whose brain is mush and a father who knows who you are and how you feel by the way you breathe."

"Ever since you didn't get first prize in the cake competition, I've been listening to that sigh," says Harmon. "You were seventeen. Now tell me, what's going on?"

Julie hisses. "Don't forget a thing, do you?"

Harmon smiles. "Sure I do. I can't remember the last time you used a civil tongue."

"Why do you let Mom answer the phone?"

"And why do you let Brianna watch television?—just as silly a question. Now come on. I don't want to argue with you. I know that something's up, and I can't help you, if you won't tell me what it is."

Harmon and Julie hear a crash.

"What was that?" says Julie.

"I need to check on your mother."

"Wait!" Julie's voice goes up an octave. "What's happening?"

"Julie, calm down."

"Has Mom become violent?"

"No, she has not. Talk to you later."

* * *

Ever since her husband died, Julie has become paranoid of losing Brianna. If the school bus is late, she calls the police. If the child sneezes, she rushes her to the doctor. Almost a year ago, it took nearly a week of phone calls and emails to convince Julie not to take Brianna out of school, after the poor girl twisted her ankle during recess. Harmon has nicknamed Julie "the vicarious hypochondriac." Now that she's in counseling, things are a bit better. He'll call her later.

Neither he nor Millie spanked or hit Julie, when she was growing up. They rarely argued, and always did so with low voices, whether Julie was around or not. The only time Harmon ever got violent was in the middle of a nightmare. It was one of those dreams that rattle the skin, that make you feel as if your organs have somehow gone inside out. The car had run out of gas. As he and Millie and Julie walked down a steep hill toward the nearest station, the parking brake came loose, and the car came at them. Husband shoved wife and child into a ditch. In real life, Harmon knocked Millie out of bed. When he explained the dream, Millie said she understood, but he knew she was shaken. He went out and bought a bigger bed. They made love in it the day it arrived. When the payments became a burden, Millie took on a summer secretarial job. They both slept well in the king-size bed, which they gave to Julie, when they left for the mountains of Georgia.

Harmon checks on Millie, who's sitting on the guest bedroom floor playing with Julie's old wooden blocks. The phone receiver sways. Millie's hair, a combination of gray and white waves, accentuates the lack of expression on her face. Harmon puts back the receiver and sits on the floor. The blocks are stacked in a way that reminds him of the coastal New England saltbox where Millie was born.

"Nantasket," says Harmon, referring to their hometown.

"Nan-tas-ket," says Millie, brushing her hair behind her ears. For a moment, her expression transforms from stiff and wooden to soft and sinuous, like the oxbow of the brook in her parents' front yard, where as a boy, Harmon had accidentally tossed a newspaper. Her lips part, as if she's about to say something, and when she can't, her face regains its rigor mortis. Harmon uses a tissue to wipe away the drool.

"I don't know," says Millie. "I don't know."

Harmon holds her tightly.

* * *

Betty Lynn meets Harmon and Millie in the parking lot of The Grease in the Pan. She tells Harmon that the owner wants to use Millie's picture on the restaurant's Web site. "The one of Millie and Brianna standing at the salad bar."

Harmon says he'll think about it. When Millie's hash browns land on the shoes of an out-of-town customer, Harmon apologizes. After the meal, he agrees to the photo and offers Betty Lynn an extra five dollars. She hands it back.

"You don't need to worry," she says. "Y'all are family. Should know that by now."

* * *

Harmon and Millie Pixon own a house in a development built in the '80s. They live on a steep and rutted dirt path that's supposed to be maintained by the residents. One of the neighbors refuses to contribute his share, so neither does anyone else. Every spring the ruts and potholes get bigger. Last winter, when nine inches of snow stranded residents for a week, Betty Lynn came in an ATV filled with supplies. When she found out that Millie had a cold, she stayed long enough to make a pot of soup beans with ham.

Soup is one of the words Millie remembers, along with *corn* and *farm*.

Whenever they're driving, and Millie sees rows of corn growing along the hillsides, she says, "Farm-farm-farm, corn farm."

"Harmon says, "Yes," and repeats his wife's phrase.

Harmon loves to drive, but goes only as far as Millie allows. Even though she can't say much, he knows when she's had enough. There's a noise she makes. A cross between a sigh and a bleat, the warning signal can come at any time, even after Millie has gleefully identified every patch of corn between The Grease in the Pan and the North Carolina border. When he first heard the sound, Harmon wasn't sure if Millie was content or in distress. The exhalation appeared cathartic, while the bleat reminded him of a fawn demanding milk from its mother. Still unsure of how to interpret the expression, Harmon sees it as a sign that Millie's bedtime is fast approaching.

* * *

Millie sleeps as Harmon drives. A rectangle of corn forms a small break in the thick stand of oaks, hickories, and pines on the right side of the road. Decelerating, he taps his wife on the shoulder.

"Look," he says, pointing to a sign advertising fresh produce. "Farm-farm-farm."

"Ooooooh, farm-farm-farm," says Millie, who had run barefoot through a cornfield on their second date. "Corn farm: how wonderful."

Harmon helps Millie out of the car, and they walk hand-in-hand across the grass. At the edge of the field sits a weathered card table shaded by a shagbark hickory, its shavings crunching beneath their shoes as they approach. Sitting on the table is an old cigar box for money and a book for customers to record their purchases. They are alone. Millie ignores the table, heading straight for a bin full of corn. She repeats her mantra, the words

farm and *corn* filling her with energy. Harmon lets go of her hand, and she goes to work, squeezing an ear, pulling back its husk. She runs her fingers over the kernels to check for freshness. Her body moves with a sense of purpose and dignity. Harmon places his hands on her shoulders and closes his eyes.

They were both seventeen, when he realized his attraction for the girl whose father had called him a punk. Millie was working a farm stand on the outskirts of Nantasket. It had started to rain. After attending to the last customer, she began to shuck corn, her narrow waist twisting back and forth as she denuded the vegetable. When she saw Harmon looking, she reached into the bin and pulled out an oversized ear. She put it behind her head and pretended to be an Indian—skipping in a circle, chanting, and patting her mouth. Then she gathered a handful of tassels and placed them around her neck, before slinking behind a stack of unwashed potatoes. He wasn't sure if she were making fun of a customer or pretending to be a model, but her sense of humor had him hooked.

A car downshifts, causing Harmon to open his eyes. A young couple in an SUV pause briefly before shooting up the hill. When the vehicle disappears, a high-pitched chatter lets Harmon and Millie know they have company.

"Painted bunting," says Millie.

Harmon turns toward the hickory. A moment later, the bird flutters out of the trees, its striking blue head, red-orange breast, and yellow-green wings reminding him of an Indian legend: the Great Spirit was running low on dye and had to use more than one color to finish creating the bird. Perhaps the deity could come up with a similar remedy for a shrinking supply of brain tissue. Millie drops the corn and begins to sigh and bleat. Harmon says a "Hail Mary," as he puts money in the box.

At home Harmon boils the corn—fifteen minutes with a teaspoon of salt—while Millie sits at the kitchen table. Every so often she nods in approval, as if she were back at the high school teaching home economics. When the vegetable has cooled, he uses a sharp knife to cut the kernels into a bowl.

"Very good," says Millie.

Harmon smiles.

Millie pushes away the food. Harmon microwaves a bowl of chicken noodle, hands her a spoon, and she eats. After the dishes are put away, he checks his email. Ferdie1949 is still trying to fix his father's old Philco. The radio works, the customer says, except when it comes to WIRL, the only station his father will listen to.

Harmon suggests “compensating condensers to peak up the signal. Then you can retune the IF coils.”

Despite her lack of interest in old radios, Millie had made a point to learn all the jargon she could get her hands on. When Harmon asked her why, she gave him a look of defiance.

“Just try and stop me,” said Millie.

“I wouldn’t think of it,” replied Harmon.

She had always been smarter than he.

* * *

The sex had long fizzled out, but the couple never stopped flirting, at least not until Millie got sick. A few years ago, she made up a song about radio parts and performed it as a striptease. Harmon wasn’t much for music and dance, but Millie’s act had made him laugh. He’d do anything to see her perform it again.

He Googles Ferdie’s father’s radio station and turns up the sound.

“You’ve been listening to Vaughn Monroe,” says the announcer, “the voice with hairs on its chest.”

“Never heard of him,” says Harmon, “but I’m sure Millie has.” Harmon heads outside to fill the birdfeeders, which were ransacked recently by a family of bears. When he returns, he checks on Millie. She’s awake. The radio station has timed out.

“Continental,” she says, waving a scarf above her head. “Continental.”

“You want to go on a trip?” says Harmon.

“*The Continental*,” says Millie, her voice impatient, her face flushed.

“We usually fly Delta, but if you want to go on the Continental plane, that’s fine. Where shall we go? Florida?”

“No.”

“Back home?”

“No.”

The next morning Harmon receives a call from Julie, who has heard a segment on the news and is now worried that Millie might wander into the national forest and get mauled by a bear. He nearly tells her about the feeders, but stops himself.

“We’re both fine,” he says, “as fine as one can expect.”

* * *

Millie won't talk. Harmon looks at her throat, which is red. They skip the trip to The Grease in the Pan and head to the doctor, who prescribes antibiotics. Millie has a bug.

At the pharmacy, they run into Betty Lynn, who insists on coming over to help. Harmon hands her a five and asks her to pick up some pastries.

"I think she's been asking for a continental breakfast," says Harmon, unable to forget Millie's last spoken words.

When Betty Lynn arrives, Millie pushes away the food. The only sounds she makes are bleats and sighs and an occasional cough. Harmon speaks to the doctor, who calls in a cough suppressant. Betty Lynn picks it up. When the narcotic takes effect, Harmon and Betty Lynn sip sweet tea on the screened-in porch.

"I know you don't want to hear this, but you may need to think about some other options," says Betty Lynn, her drawl accompanied by an assortment of chirps and squawks, as the birds compete for a chance at the feeders.

"You're right," says Harmon. "I don't want to hear this."

Betty Lynn pauses. "A nursing home isn't the only option."

"I know, but I can't afford to bring someone in."

"I wouldn't mind . . ."

"No," Harmon interrupts.

"What about Julie?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Harmon groans. "She's got her own life."

"Have you asked her?"

"No, and I'm not about to."

* * *

That night Harmon dreams that the word *continental* is the key to a puzzle that will cure Millie's disease. A six-letter word converges vertically at the *i*. He thinks for a moment and writes the word *divide*. Suddenly awake, he checks on Millie, who is sleeping soundly. He turns on the computer and goes to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where he reads about a continental quilt. He tiptoes up to the attic to look through the bin marked WINTER, where he retrieves a down duvet they had bought on a trip to England. On his way down the stairs, he stumbles and Millie awakens.

"I've found the continental," says Harmon.

Millie yawns and pushes away the offering.

* * *

Regaining some of her strength, Millie fails to recover her voice. She spends most of her time in bed. Over the upcoming days, Harmon presents her with an assortment of offerings, from the pictures of the family trip across Colorado's continental divide to Julie's old geography project, a papier-mâché model depicting the continental drift. Millie fails to speak. Her appetite grows weaker. He takes her to the doctor, who recommends a nursing home. Harmon refuses. Back home, he reads about the Continental Congress, continental copper, and continental currency. He falls asleep very late. Before dawn, he's awakened by the sound of whimpering. He switches on the light to see an empty space next to him. He finds Millie crying on the floor of the walk-in closet.

"It's OK," says Harmon, stroking his wife's hair. "It was dark, and you got lost. I could've done the same thing."

Millie bleats, and Harmon helps her back to bed. Once she has fallen asleep, he cries.

The following day Harmon returns to the attic to look for Millie's father's old coin collection.

"Continental currency," he says, placing a German Riechmark in Millie's palm.

When she bites down on the coin, he takes it away, along with the rest of the collection.

After Harmon has administered the cough medicine, Millie sleeps, and he checks his email. Ferdie1949 wants to go with the compensating condensers. As Harmon prepares the order, he tunes his computer to WIRL and listens to Fred Astaire singing *Night and Day*. The announcer reminds listeners that Turner Classic Movies is showing Fred and Ginger in *The Gay Divorcé* at eight.

"Sounds awful," says Harmon.

"Call in now and name a song from *The Gay Divorcé*," says the DJ. "The first caller will receive a \$10 gift certificate for any CV Green's Pharmacy."

Harmon clicks on an email update from the Alzheimer's online support group. Joanna from North Carolina fell and broke her hip. She's in the hospital, and her husband has been moved to an "assisted living facility specializing in memory loss." Harmon spoke to her in an online chat last month, after her husband had stuffed a peanut up his nose. Harmon opts out of the email updates and turns up the sound.

"You're on the air," says the DJ.

The caller wins a gift certificate for naming a song called *The Continental*.

Harmon feels his heart skip a beat.

"That's it," he whispers.

A moment later, he calls up Fred and Ginger on YouTube. He watches closely, as the two skitter down a white staircase.

"Too many steps," says Harmon, as the dancers perform their fancy footwork. "Probably make me into a sissy."

* * *

He buys the soundtrack of *The Gay Divorcé*, along with a dance dictionary. Millie completes another round of antibiotics. She still doesn't speak, and her energy is low. They go to The Grease in the Pan. This time Millie eats her hash browns. When she gets home, she throws up. As she sleeps, Harmon watches *The Continental* on YouTube, listens to his new CD, and reads about dance steps. So far he's deciphered Fred's first slow step: a *rond de jambe*, meaning "a circular movement of the leg," followed by some kind of foot drag. He goes to the mirror to try the movement. As he circles his leg from front to side, he loses his balance.

"This is ridiculous."

He reads out his notes: "Front, side, back, side. Step-drag, step-drag."

He tries it again and messes up on the step-drag. "I must be out of my mind."

He concentrates on the lyrics:

It has a passion, The Continental,

An invitation to moonlight and romance.

It's quite the fashion, The Continental,

Because you tell of your love while you dance.

* * *

During the week that Harmon teaches himself the first few steps of *The Continental*, Millie stays mostly in bed. She can no longer walk on her own. Her eating is sporadic and is sometimes followed by violent spells of vomiting. Harmon knows she is dying. He calls Julie, and she books a flight. He stops teaching himself *The Continental*. The night before Julie's arrival, Harmon hears a noise while brushing his teeth. When he comes out of the bathroom, he finds Millie dragging the boom box across the living room floor. Harmon bends down, and Millie mewls. Her expression is one of desperation, her sunken eye sockets quivering and dripping with tears.

“You want to dance?” he says.

Millie fails to respond. Her face is stiff.

Harmon turns on the music and helps his wife to a standing position. They barely move, husband holding wife by the waist and hand, as Ginger Rogers sings of “two bodies swaying.” Millie turns toward Harmon, and he kisses her cheek. They begin to dance.

STEPHEN HERZ

Boxcar 113 0695-5

I am standing outside the Holocaust Museum
in Madeira Beach, Florida
in front of a lone cattlecar
from Auschwitz.

The sign informs me it is not a cattlecar,
but a boxcar:

*this car has no air slits,
so it became a suffocation chamber
for the people, up to 150 at a time
squeezed into it.*

I am running my hands over its slats.
I am climbing the running board the guard rode.
I try the door: it won't slide,
won't budge.

I see a padlock. Locked. Rusting.

I look for nail holes.

I look up:

the palm tree is a tall chimney
belching red and black.

Stench of burning flesh. Shouting. Crying.

Dogs bark. Loudspeakers blare.

Guard towers. Barbed wire stretches to the horizon.

I am jumping down.

A strange skeleton in stripes whispering
in my ear:

Say you're eighteen.

Tell them you have a trade.

HADLEY HURY

I See By Your Outfit That You Are a Cowboy

Though I must have seen my father's face
in repose in some moments
when he was alive,
I'm not at all sure I remember them, and
now, if I were to come upon a photograph
of him not smiling,
I wonder how I would
recognize him, for
he went out every day to the world
that way, armed with assertive bonhomie,
humor that insisted,
an insinuating laugh.

He was needy—
not for wealth, or women, or liquor,
but, I think, for warmth. He grew up
not without a decent house
or things or money,
but nonetheless on the streets, eating at cafes
and hanging out at the gym,
or going to movies.
His father was kind
but stayed busy with work,
and his mother was cool,
curt, querulous,
her only laugh a staccato bark
corrosive with irony, and
she met any act of human kindness
by asking now why would they do that?
He and his brother
were on their own.

He needed regular dinners around a table,
family talk and little league,

questions about his day at school,
and a familiar mantel
to hang a stocking in the holidays.

He gave me all that—
and nearly drove me crazy.
We were as different as father and son
could be, and I worked at it,
and I had a need to be left alone;
but as I advance in years
his impatience with sadness will
sometimes rise as a flush in my neck,

and I hear him quite distinctly in my
surprisingly corny jokes,
and feel his feet hurrying me over for
a hug with a friend, or find my brow
lifting to make a silly face at
the sad child languishing
unregarded in the next line
at the grocery store.

He hoped and I think he prayed
and so, I think, do I— when I dare to forget
my chill disapproval of my own hunger,
and let, as he did,
daily billows of gratitude
carry us forward:
for we each found a good woman
who brought us in near the fire.

Sometimes I see us, just the two of us,
in a high unbounded desert,
and as the vast night presses us close,
the sharp commingled scent
of pinyon, dying embers, and the
feral, faintly sexual, tang of tarp
flays our senses open to the cold stars,
and he asks, without judgment,

looking out, beyond us, into blackness,
if I still have a chip on my shoulder,
and what's so hard about
actually taking the time to learn
to dive off the board correctly,
and I, looking just over his left shoulder,
ask him if he's still embarrassing himself
and everybody else by telling
for the ten thousandth time the one about
the poor lame man whose suit fits so well,
and thank him for sending me out to get
a good education and find Faulkner
and Kierkegaard and self-conscious anxiety,
and then we laugh,
and make the bitter dregs
of joe swirl, and last in our tin cups
until it is time to go—
backward or forward
to where we belong.

ELIZABETH W. JACKSON

Driving Home Late After a Party

As if David Niven had invaded my friend's body,
that voice starts talking from the passenger side
of the car: words ventriloquized through Eser's lips.
The accent arches and falls, thick as rain between us—
the prairie-land vowels I've known, smothered.
He tells me this English is his own,

learned at home in Dubai—
last week's phonemes, something put on
for the American Midwest, a college leftover.
The car's headlights rush over the road. Midnight.
And I listen to the trilling tongue
of the small island that once tried to take over the world.

Inflating with stories of his parents' migration,
afternoons kicking soccer balls with the other boys
from Turkey and Palestine, he recalls
being mesmerized by a high rise on Sheikh Zayed—
men high as the stars clambering up scaffolding
to fit glass to frame while Brits chatted below
with a man in a turban leaning against a gold Rolls-Royce.

I think of history: the American Dream
spoken in Gaelic and Italian, parents
learning English from their children over Colcannon soup
or teaching them to dance the Tarantella.
In the car's dark, there's no easy memory
of Eser's dusky skin and bristle-brush hair,
only his eyes, that bright reflected light.

MERCEDES LUCERO

In the Garden of Broken Things

To begin with, we broke windows. We didn't mean to, of course. It just sort of happened, the way most anything happens. Sometimes the glass shattered slowly and rippled out from the center like a flower blooming. The baseballs we threw with fake signatures often broke windows this way. Other times, they broke quickly like when we lifted classroom windows by pressing our palms against them. We pushed against the glass and it would break, or rather, disappear. There were moments when the windows were there, clear and shining and then there were moments when they weren't, when there were nothing but sharp edges of glass poking out from the wood. The other children would gather to see a small trail of blood dripping off of our hands. They tell us a teacher fainted once, but we do not remember. Instead we remember the pieces of glass on the floor and the way they sparkled when the light hit them.

We broke bones, too. Sometimes only days after getting our casts off on our right arm, we broke our left. We broke our fingers when we accidentally shut doors on them. We broke our ankles and wrists when we fell from trees. We used to climb them and imagine the big houses we could see just over the hill were our own.

When we were young, our mother broke a fingernail almost everyday. She used to buy those stickon nails and paint them all sorts of colors with names like Lemonade and Cherry Pop. When one would break off, she would bring us all together and say, "First one to find it gets a dime," and we all would go running around the house, up the stairs and through the hallways. We would crawl on our stomachs to look under beds and reach our small fingers under the sofas and chairs. We would always find it in strangest places. In the ashes of the fireplace. On the dog's tail. Once, we found one while eating a pumpkin pie our mother had baked only three days before.

During our adolescent years, we broke out in acne.

Over the years, we've learned to break the ice with new people we've met. We ask them about their family and jobs and the names of their children. We smile and laugh a laugh we've perfected over the years when we are alone driving in our cars. We always ask the same things. We tell ourselves we sound like broken records.

One summer our car broke down at least once a week.

Our father once broke our mother's favorite ceramic bowl. It wasn't her favorite, really. She never used it. It was her favorite unused bowl. She

brought it home one evening after our grandmother died. It was a cream color with little blue chickens lined all the way around. She put it atop the cabinets in the kitchen and there it sat for a long time collecting a layer of grey dust. An antique, she called it. Our father used a step ladder to bring it down one day. What good is a nice dish if we never use it, he said. He blew on it and we danced under the dust and pretended it was snow. When he missed the bottom step on the ladder, he fell. The bowl slipped from his hands and broke into sixtyeight different pieces. We counted them as we placed them into a plastic grocery bag.

We've lost sleep thinking about our broken relationships. When our friends moved away, we wondered if it was because of something we said. It usually was. We said we would call our mother and we never did. We lied and told people who loved us that yes, we were happy. Sometimes we caught ourselves staring at old photographs late into the night and wondered if maybe it was possible for two people to have nothing in common.

In order to avoid getting our heart broken, we sometimes pretended we did not have one. We probably learned this from our father.

Sooner or later, we broke rules. When we were young we broke them by sneaking out of our windows and telling our mother we'd never kissed anyone. We often broke curfew. Now that we are older, we break different kinds of rules. We don't make full stops at stop signs. We don't take our vitamins. We don't wait an hour after eating to go swimming.

When our father lost his job building railroad tracks we saw him break down. He just fell to the floor of the living room. He wept heavily, kneeling on the carpet and covered his face with his hands. We were young and had never seen our father cry in front of us. We didn't know what to do. We were scared. We spent a long time just staring at his hands, wrinkled with small little folds of skin around the knuckles. Sometimes we stare out windows thinking of memories like these.

Sometimes we feel as if we are broken on the inside, but we can't really say why. Sometimes we wonder if we'll ever feel unbroken.

Several years ago, the beaver dam up north broke and parts of the town flooded. Our father took us to see the dam and we spent the morning hiking along a trail to the small river to see the damage. Our father pointed to the beavers amid the sludge of broken sticks and mud and grass. They would only carry small handfuls at a time. It will take them forever to rebuild it, we said. Our father stood silent for a long time and then sighed and said yes, but that's what we do with broken things isn't it?

ALICE OWENS JOHNSON

Canebrake

Past a billboard reading
Jesus to Go
red roads coil
in Ala-goddam-bama.

Dozing under the steps
its soft flesh wounded
and marked
by man's angry hoe,
the Diamondback

soft as a baby
coiled and sleepy rattles
like a tambourine.
A swig of righteousness

to be on the safe side
cause the Lard's
got a map of rapture
just waiting for you

to step on.

ROSIE KNOTTS

The Point

It is quiet tonight, and the moon is bright.
There are no waves—
just a gentle lapping of the water against the beach
as though a giant dog had stuck his head into the ocean
and drank deeply,
slop-slop, slop-slop, slop-slop.

The sand is cold on her bare feet
and a wind blows only now and then.
The pier stretches in the distance
and beyond it is The Point.

The beach is not friendly at night,
the sand doesn't give under the fall of her footsteps;
it is as hard and as cold as cement.
The water doesn't slosh up around her ankles
but advances and retreats with suspicion,
only brushing her toes with a sinister chill,
never crashing.

Silence is unnatural for the sea.

The pier looms in the distance,
growing in size, growing in height, growing in length;
she passes underneath it.
It remains nothing but a silhouette.

Her footfalls never waver or hesitate;
it is the sound of steady, emotionless pounding
that can barely be heard—
like a heartbeat,
but lacking in life.

The Point approaches,
shaped like a sabre,
coming nearer,
nearer.
She is not cold.
She is not tired.
She is not afraid.

She moves steadily
forward
forward
forward to meet The Point,
never slowing in pace.

The Point has reached her;
she has reached The Point.
But her pace does not slow, her steps do not turn.
She walks steadily forward into the shallow
lapping of the spectral, silent sea.
Her feet disappear into the dark, quiet water,
and the current swallows her.

There are no gulls in the sky,
and the fish have all swam away.
I watch this alone.
I will never tell.
It is her secret—her's and the sea's.

JOHN P. KRISTOFKO

Forsythia

The plants were wild in the fall,
so I dug them up to set into a line,
resisting me like ignorance,
betrayed by light that found their knuckled hearts
clinging to the faithful soil.

Clipped to half their size,
they stared like bony ghosts
at deadly winter passing,
and I lost them like the prayers I forgot
until Easter, and sunlight called them forth
and bathed them in the light of hope,
doctrine of its saving, yellow soul.

PAT SPEARS

Whelping

It has to be my pinched face that backs off my buddy Hansford Lee. Above my collar, my heat spreads with the acceleration of a grass fire, and I'm kicking my ass for having given away so much. I put my back to him and fix my gaze on the vacant space where I parked my pickup at the start of the shift. I tell myself that in her right mind, Mary Alice would never do whatever it is she's done.

I remove my cap, run my fingers through my damp hair, and set the cap back on, pulling the bill low the way I might when heading into a strong wind. When I've given myself time, I turn and face the security guard. The poor bastard wipes sweat from his forehead with a red bandanna, the kind fool pet owners tie around the necks of their disgraced dogs. His flabby jowls quiver with his steady mopping, and I want to dump my misery squarely on him. But I know better.

"Had to figure she had your okay," the guard stammers. "Her, your wife and all."

The two men exchange a look that questions whether or not I'm man enough to row my own boat where my wife's concerned. Then she's not my wife, exactly, but that's got nothing to do with why she took my truck the way she did.

"Did you even see what happened?" I'm unsure what I expect to learn from him about what's bothering me the most. He's already said she never as much as spoke.

Squinting from beneath his furrowed brow, he details the arrival of a Black Diamond cab that dropped her around noon. "Like I done said, she just slipped behind the steering wheel and headed south onto the by-pass."

He points in the direction of the by-pass, and I notice his arthritis-snarled hand. Then I don't pity him the way I might if I didn't already know he sits out his shift in the guard shack, swigging whiskey. I kick at a clod of dirt, stare off toward the by-pass, and back at the old man, wanting to ask if she was wearing a dirty pink robe, but I don't dare.

"You ain't thinking about getting the law in on this?" He glances back over his shoulder in the direction of the shack, and I get that I'm not the first to lose a vehicle, and that his ass-soft job likely hangs in the balance.

"Hell no, why would I? Ain't like my truck's stole." I pause. "What I've got is a damn mix-up."

The old man exhales, clearly relieved, but neither he nor Hansford Lee are buying my line. I wish I'd left off the part about it coming down to a simple mix-up. The throbbing pain at the base of my skull feels like a mule kicking, and I oblige, "But you can bet your sweet ass this'll get straightened out once I've caught up to her."

Both nod, their body language signaling approval for whatever direction they imagine my reprisal will take.

I get in the truck with Hansford Lee and we drive away, the old man making a bee line for the guard shack.

"If you ask me, that old bastard didn't see shit. You smell it on him?" Hansford Lee laughs, pulling a fifth of bourbon from beneath the truck seat, and we each take turns tilting the bottle.

"You want us to swing by Wal-Mart? Check the employee lot for your truck?" He looks as doubtful as I feel, and I know he means only to bolster my earlier claim. Then I haven't told him that Mary Alice didn't go back after her short sick leave and she was let go.

"Naw, what I've got for her will keep. Let's go on. Run the dogs the way we planned."

When we've run the pack of dogs and Hansford Lee's finished dickering with the shrewd old buzzard known to sell less dog than the unaware buyer is asked to pay for, he drops me off at home. Neither he nor I speak to the fact that my truck isn't in the yard. He wouldn't, since he thinks she's still working the swing shift.

Still he asks, "You gonna want me to stop by in the morning?" He spits a stream of tobacco juice through the open window onto the ground and wipes his mouth on the back of his hand. "That is, just in case."

"Think not. But then I'll let you know." I slam the door shut and he reaches, turning up the radio, driving away in an ear-splitting burst of one of those somebody done somebody wrong songs.

I ignore the excited dogs barking and crashing against the kennel wire, and go straight into the trailer. I stand just inside the kitchen door, straining for sights or sounds of the familiar, anything that works to slow the despair that's begun to soak into my consciousness. But there's only the gasping of the dying fridge and Mattie's soft whine from the other side of the utility room door.

I step further inside, and right away I spot the envelope propped innocently as the sweet baby Jesus against the ceramic salt and pepper set, centered on the round garage-sale table she sanded and painted lime green. She'd stopped going to class, saying that the chirpy housewives made her

feel like an imposter. It's true that marriage was my idea while she'd insisted that she could never be sure. I argued that life is nothing if not risk, and that I wasn't expecting certainty, only a chance. Still she held out, even after we learned she was pregnant.

I pick up the note, sniff it the way one of my hounds might coming upon something unexpected. It smells sweet and spicy like crushed roses in ginger, and it carries the fragrance of intimacy. I slip the thin blade of my pocket knife beneath the flap, and take care to cut smoothly. My gut twisted into knots, I read: "Dear Charlie, I may still love you, but I need time alone." She offers nothing as to how much time or why alone, only that she's left a meatloaf in the fridge, and that she has taken Moses for company.

Moses arrived two years ago along with Mary Alice and her few possessions. I'm a dog person and I never liked the cat. I surely won't miss its nasty habit of rubbing its smelly ass across the carpet. Still, her need for company speaks of too much time alone. I slip the note back into the envelope, reseal it with clear tape, and prop it against the squatty strawberries as if doing so might somehow undo the uncertainty that burns my chest with an odor of singed hair.

I take a cold beer from the fridge, open the door to the utility room, and Mattie follows me outside to tend the kenneled Beagles. I scoop dry feed into empty pans and draw fresh water, an ear cocked for the sound of my truck approaching along the dirt road that runs in front of the trailer. When I've put the last of the pups in for the night with their anxious mama, I start back along the worn path, Mattie waddling along next to my boot heel, her swollen belly nearly dragging the ground. We reach the steep back steps and Mattie stops, looks up at me, her brown eyes pleading. I cup her rear end in my hands, giving her a gentle lift, and she struggles upward.

Caught off guard by a gush of tenderness, my eyes tear and my emotions become tangled. But it's long walks with Mary Alice late into her pregnancy I remember. Walks, even after her belly had grown so big she'd laughed, gently mocking, declaring that her belly would surely engulf her if the baby didn't come soon. Approaching steep drops in the trail, she'd encircle her belly, her finger laced, forming a cradling sling for our unborn child.

Inside, trapped air presses hot against my damp skin, and I wish I'd remembered to crank up the window AC unit. I refill Mattie's food and water bowls and take the meatloaf from the fridge, cutting thin slices, placing them in the microwave and setting the timer.

Because I can't bear sitting across the table from the pink note, I sit on the sofa, eating meatloaf fold-overs. I watch SportsCenter with the sound

muted, and when darkness has crept into every corner of the room, I stop listening for sounds along the road. I gather my empty dishes and add them to those already submerged in yesterday's greasy cold water.

Because I don't know what I should do next, I plunder through the rooms, thinking that there may be clues in what she has chosen to leave behind. I pause at our bedroom door, run my hand along the thin wall paneling. In the moment it takes for the light to overtake the darkness, I convince myself that I'll find her napping. My missing truck a practical joke and I'll return to find it parked where I left it, and the pink envelope will exist only in a bad dream.

Napping was what she'd called her lengthening bouts of refusing to come out of the bedroom. Forgetting or refusing the bowls of canned soup I prepared and delivered bedside. On her better days, she nibbled saltine crackers and drank black coffee. She went without showering, and when she did, she refused to change out of the pink robe she'd worn home from the hospital. I've waited twenty-seven days for her to come back to me, but she'd remained the same, until today.

Her side of the closet is bare and the rusted cabinet above the sink holds only my razor, deodorant, and bristle rifted toothbrush. I open and close jumbled drawers, stopping only when it becomes clear that she has taken nothing of us. Her action was impulsive and committed in haste. For now, I choose to believe that the same may very well turn her around and bring her back.

Hansford Lee gives me rides to and from work, and I soon tire of his side-ways glances. I tell him that she called from Memphis, crying and confessing that she was wrong to have left the way she did. His scowling pushes me further, and I add that her sister's baby came early with complications. That she's staying on to help with her three young nieces. Hansford squints over at me, and it's clear he smells a skunk, but he doesn't follow with his rant on what he'd do if his wife ever tried pulling such a stunt.

Even though Mary Alice's parents live three hours away, hiding her absence isn't easy. Mildred calls weekly, demanding to speak with Mary Alice. I started by telling her Mary Alice was at her night class at the local community college. The following week, she was seeing a ladies' movie with a work friend.

During Monday Night Football, the third week, I open the front door to Mildred's insistent pounding. Her hands ride her hips and her bulk plugs the doorway. Over her shoulder, I see Ben slumped behind the wheel,

staring straight ahead through the windshield, the truck exhaust billowing thick blue smoke. Still I know better than to hope for a short stay.

“All right, Charlie. I’m sick and tired of your lies. Where’s she at?”

I consider the odds of continuing to lie, but a quick measure of her wrath, along with the fact that keeping my story straight has become too fucking hard, I tell her the little I know.

“Gone? No way she just up and left without a word.” Her anger hisses over rotted teeth, her breath foul in a way that backs me off. “She may have gone against her Godly upbringing.” She pauses, and I know she means her notion of our living in mortal sin. “But that don’t mean she’s fallen so low she’d traipse off with some other ungodly loser.”

“Holy shit, no, ma’am. I swear, she’s nothing like that.”

“Blasphemy,” she hisses. Still she exhales hard and I decide it’s the confession of guilt she’s come for, and maybe it’s enough to send her on her way.

“But that don’t change the fact my child’s missing.” Mildred screams that I’m to call the law. Report that a serial rapist has abducted Mary Alice.

“No, it’s like I said. She’s not missing and that’s different.”

To rid myself of the terrifying picture planted in my mind, I confess the note. One for my eyes only, I tell her, and that it holds no clues, only that she was taking time alone.

Mildred’s anger fires like gasoline on hot coals, and its intensity sucks the air from the room. Because I feel I’ll suffocate, I escape into the kitchen. But she’s relentless, enough so to turn me against breeding and training dogs to run down and corner their prey.

“Ain’t it enough you brought down God’s punishment on that poor dead baby?” She slumps, moaning, “Now He’s taken my daughter.”

My seething rage percolates to the surface and I despise her for her pious wickedness. I imagine my hands around her neck: strong, hostile, and final. Erasing forever the memory of her claim that God took our baby to teach us a bitter lesson. Mary Alice wept so, an orderly forced a resisting Mildred from the room, and when I could not comfort Mary Alice, I’d left her alone and sat the balance of the night in the hospital parking lot, hurting in ways I’d never before imagined.

Mildred rushes to the front door, yelling for Ben, who comes to stand in the doorway and listen without comment. I resent that she never once looks to me as a way of getting her story straight, making it sound as though I should have read Mary Alice’s mind. Known what she’d meant to do, and stopped her.

When Mildred runs out of breath, Ben looks at me and not at her. His eyes are sad, and he reminds me of the aging buffalo I'd once seen penned in a small corral, put there to attract tourists. A relic of another time, condemned to live out its final days without the comfort of its own kind.

Neither Ben nor I speak and Mildred catches a second wind, and although she and I just agreed Mary Alice isn't the loose type, Mildred hurls the names of men I've never before heard mentioned. I begin to think that any one of these strange men may have been wiser, known what to say and how to comfort her, where I'd failed. I drop into a kitchen chair, work at closing my mind, my trembling hands mentally cupped to my ears.

"Damnit, Mildred, stop. Can't you see he doesn't know a bit more than you do? Leave the poor boy be." He turns to me, "Son, you'll call with news of her?"

"Yes sir, I swear. You'll be my first call."

Mildred has begun to sob in the way I think a pained mama would, and I'm grateful to Ben when he takes her arm and leads her out of the house. He helps her into the truck and drives her away. I don't want to see her broken that way. I want to blame her for the fact that I can't drink a few beers and go to bed on the couch, sleep a little, and wait for time to go to work. Instead I walk to the nearest bar and get drunk enough that I don't see Mary Alice with other men.

I figure Hansford has my situation sorted out when he stops saying what he'd do. I'm pretty sure the entire shift knows, but no one says as much, not even when I screw up routine printing jobs. They cover for me, and it's in the way of giving me time that I haven't said I need. But the time comes when I can no longer bear the shame of their pity, and I tell Hansford that I lied before, and that she left because I'd screwed around on her.

Hansford stands, leaning against a collator, cradling his balls, his gaze fixed. Then he nods, accepting that a man worth his salt would rather trade the truth for a false confession of tomcatting.

I finally get the promotion and raise Mary Alice and I had hoped for, and rather than go in debt for a six year old, like-new F-150, I bargain a six pack of my best dogs for a piece of shit Chevy, and agree to take up my brother's payments on a house he's losing to the bank.

I rent the single-wide to a young couple. The boy's hardly more than seventeen or eighteen, and in spite of her distended belly, I take the girl to be even younger. He brags he's full-time at one of the chain burger joints and the way he talks, he's in line for manager. She stocks inventory at the nearby K-Mart and, from the looks of her, that's short term. The location and the fact that the rent is dirt cheap make the place right for them.

The whole time we talked, those kids couldn't keep their hands off each other, and I got so bad off I thought about kidnapping the dark-haired girl. But I settled for their promise to give Mary Alice my new address and phone number should she happen by.

Hansford Lee and I load furniture onto my pickup and unload it into the two-bedroom frame house on Pine Street. The neighborhood is the picture of what she'd said she wanted when the baby came. The streets are overrun with laughing kids riding battered bikes, and I like that these kids are chased by a mix of long-legged brown dogs.

Hansford leaves and I take the last of the warm beers from the cooler and sit out back in a folding lawn chair. Azaleas grow against a tangled wire fence, and I let myself hope that by the time these are in full bloom, she'll be here to enjoy them.

Growing up, I never lived in a house that my parents owned. We had moved from small town to small town, my dad chasing yet another sure-fired scheme that was to guarantee the respectability he never achieved. By the time I reached eight or nine, Mama had stopped believing in his fanciful dreams, but she stayed on. Her crutch was the bottle she hid beneath the kitchen sink.

Beyond the wire fence at the edge of an open field, the cooing of two mourning doves opens a melancholy vein, and my loneliness takes me to evenings spent with Mary Alice. She spoke earnestly of quitting her cashier's job and going back to college, finishing her degree in elementary education. I talked of getting off shift work and onto days with afternoons free to help Hansford Lee coach Pee Wee football. Mattie whimpers and I reach, stroking her between her ears, and she snuggles her cheek against my hand. I'm not sure, but I feel she shares my mood.

Approaching darkness brings a deeper chill and I stand, stretching my sore back, and go back inside the silent house. Supper is a bowl of cereal, and when I've finished, I start unpacking boxes, searching for sheets and blankets. Among the many unmarked boxes is the one I know well. It holds the tiny red Western Flyer.

When I brought the wagon home, Mary Alice was only two months pregnant. She'd laughed softly, and I believe she was happy. She asked, "What if the baby's a girl?" No matter, I'd answered, a girl will love a red wagon.

I want to remember our baby's face, but I only saw her that one time and how could I have known I'd need to memorize her every feature? In the absence of those memories, I've chosen blue eyes for her, the color of mine, and wavy brown hair like her momma's.

Standing alone after the service, Mary Alice and I placed a bouquet of forget-me-nots and a small stuffed bear on the tiny grave. Yet neither she nor I trusted our grief to useless words, perhaps we feared evoking even greater pain. Yet, in time my grief squeezed my throat even tighter, my mouth dried with all I needed to say, especially when I'd see a girl I imagined she may have looked like at that age. The last time I dared, Mary Alice turned away, crying alone. That was the night I packed away the tiny red wagon.

I rent a carpet cleaner from the store where the young girl is supposed to work, and I'm surprisingly disappointed when I don't see her there. The front room carpet cleans up better than I'd expected, and as badly as I need the company, I don't allow Mattie to sleep next to the couch. I scrape multiple layers of oil paint off the kitchen walls and paint them Mary Alice's favorite color of lemon yellow. My sister Ann sews kitchen curtains from a yellow and white checked fabric, and when she comes, I ask her to stay after the curtains are hung.

I apologize, explaining that I don't buy diet soda, and although it doesn't show, Ann worries about her weight. She wears baggy gray sweats and a man's red flannel shirt. I make fresh coffee to go with the fruitcake she brought, and we sit at the kitchen table.

"Those curtains really do look nice. I think Mary Alice would like them."

"They do, don't they?" Ann presses the last of the cake crumbs under her fingertip and says softly, "I wish Tommy noticed pretty things. Then working two jobs, he's hardly home long enough to notice me and the kids." She licks the last of the sweetness from her fingertips.

"But, you and Tom are happy aren't you?"

"Oh, sure, hon. But days packed with herding three young kids and working jobs on different schedules," she pauses. "It can get hard to judge happy."

I get up, pour more coffee, and sit back at the table.

"You think I'm a fool to buy this house? Fixing it up for a woman who may never come back?"

"Lord, Hon, I figure we don't decide to stop loving any more than we decide to start. Remember our mama sitting nights at the kitchen table, worried sick? Her dreams for us dying a little each time Daddy came home, his meager wages lining somebody else's pocket. While I hated him for the pitiful ways we lived, I honestly believed she loved him to the day she died."

"I love Mary Alice that way." I blink back tears, and I'm unashamed. "Why do you think she left?" I still can't say "me."

“Lord knows, sweetie, I can’t say.” She reaches and touches my forearm in the comforting way she does her kids. “Disappointments have a wicked way of piling up. Then along comes something that breaks our heart and any one of us can cave.” She pauses, “Then losing a baby has to be the hardest grief to bear. Especially for a mother, I think.”

I consider what she said, particularly her notion that losing a baby is harder for a mother. And just now I can’t know if she’s right or not. But I do know I can’t imagine harder.

I walk Ann to her car and she hugs me, and in spite of myself, I cling, not wanting to let go. “Thanks for everything, Sis.”

“I’ll be back,” she whispers. “And after the holidays, what’d you say to me sewing you some pretty living room curtains?”

I hear willingness to help hold up my hope of Mary Alice returning, and not trusting myself to speak, the best I can do is nod.

She gets into the car and I blink hard, wiping snot from my upper lip. “We’re all expecting you for Thanksgiving dinner.”

I must look doubtful.

She smiles. “Come on now. Don’t you dare disappoint my boys.”

“Okay, I’ll bring beer and soda for the game.”

Back inside, I drain the pot into my cup and cut a second piece of cake. When I’ve drunk the coffee and eaten the cake, a full moon has risen and the lawn I can see from the window is covered in a fine frosty moonlight.

“Look, girl. It’s perfect for coon hunting.”

Mattie has settled in the whelping box I’ve prepared and placed next to a heat vent. She raises herself to a sitting position, her eyes half closed, and she whimpers, dropping back onto the bed.

I cross the kitchen and kneel beside her, placing my hand on her warm belly, feeling the pups’ movements. She’s in the early stages of labor. I rub my hand along the tan dots over her eyes and along her red cheeks and she licks my hand. I’d thought better than to breed her this time, but Hansford had offered to trade me his six-year-old F-150 for a healthy litter of at least five pups.

Hours later, the first pup is stillborn, a male with Mattie’s perfect markings. Before dawn, I place the second and last pup beside its littermate in the padded Nike shoebox. I touch the inside of the pup’s teardrop shape ear, and close the box.

I clean away the afterbirth and ready Mattie’s clean bed, but she chooses to sleep on the clean carpet, next to the couch. I turn out the light, and because I don’t sleep well alone I’ve taken to sleeping nights on the

couch. I'm better when I can push up against the back of the couch and feel it pushing back. I reach and stroke Mattie, and her sadness pushes up through my hand.

Thanksgiving morning is cold, the sky a cloudless blue, the kind of day Mary Alice and I had taken long walks in the woods. Afterwards we would rush back into the warmth of our rumpled bed, and make good love. I remember that she blushed the first time she'd shown me how to touch her, and how to wait.

LORI LEVY

Lukewarm

We all have them: days as bland as
coffee forgotten on the counter.
Times when there's nothing *special* to say;
no one's getting married, no one's dying.

Muddy days when the world blurs into beige,
neither the black of French Roast
nor the white of milk.

A blend you pour down the sink
because it's not what you wanted—
or swallow, resigned to tepid

though there's always a chance
you might peer inside, see something new
like a swirl of light on the surface of your drink
and begin to wonder
if even coffee grown cold can comfort;
if it's only bland because you've known better.
A sip, another, and you taste what's there:
a trace of sugar, a hint of warmth.
The choice to reheat what once was hot.

KENT MAYNARD

Mistaken for Being Beautiful

—Finstock, West Oxfordshire, 2003

Between table and lip, I spill black tea,
my arm spasmed
by the split of sound
rattling this valley. Kids set off firecrackers,
like the kak-kak-kak
of anti-aircraft guns,
the bombardment I watch
each evening of Iraq. I've learned
names of entire towns under siege,
Basra and Umm Qsar,
technical terms
for ordnance or armor, the proper procedure
for strapping on gas masks.
We always see
Baghdad at night, lit
by the strobe of laser bombs, locked
onto this building, that one
sunken or ablaze.
Fevered arcs
augur in-coming missiles,
the fireball
before the muffled whack
of cement
shattered to bones.
It's all at a distance: like fireworks
at five miles,
fountains of flame
we might think beautiful, twists of

cindered steel mistaken for glitter,
the wisp of pinwheels
torched by these boys
escaping up my road.

KAYLEE MCCALLAN

Egoist

Purple argyles flaunt an immeasurable amount of cockiness
carelessly dropping comments that hit like grenades,
on me, around me, through me.

Penny loafers stand on a fake soap box,
a house made of cards with your chin falsely held
higher than anyone's should be.

Hard to decipher if there are periods crammed
into your asinine sentences or not,
your condescending grins, hollow, brief eye contact,
barely worth finding words for.
Talking with your hands as if they possess power
and spending your words as if shrewdly giving gold to a poor man.

Titanic syndrome, you're unsinkable, impenetrable.
I wait patiently for the ice burg
and have faith despite your attempt to rattle it loose.
Compass needle points the wrong direction, so twist
your filthy finger backwards into your own chest.

Young, blue, worn jeans finally stride away unscathed
in victory of deflection.
Remain doing what you're doing but
I will move on.

SALLY STEWART MOHNEY

McDowell County Understory

for Martha

Southmountain,
black ants trundle
over heaved brown dirt.
Jack-in-the-pulpit furl
over Indian pipe ghosts.

Beyond split rail,
slender hemlock gloves
stretch into Lake James'
north cove.

Eagle sweeps by
on wave lift,
current cools.
Dark hound
keeps watch.

Above Grandfather's
cliff face, clouds
go quiet—soft
calligraphy fades
into night sky.

Plaintive hymn
lifts into the air
from New Manna
Baptist Church
on Dry Creek Road:

over hidden lake
seeps into cavern
under riprap trail,
whistles wind to
bald Catawba dam—
wades through
thick mimosa copse.

abide with me

COURTNEY NEWTON

Fire and Gasoline

Hope falls away as determined eyes fade;
It's a battle that can never be won.
Christian by blood, unable to persuade
opposing origins that bash and shun.
A fault to desire the enemy?
Unequally yoked in faith and doctrine,
a temple, a church- a polarity,
difficult to love the one viewed as sin.
With little hope left to try and agree,
the extent of want is outweighed by truth,
like fire and gasoline, it can't be
united as one without the approve.

Opposing views leave shackles on the heart,
determined destiny, failed from the start.

KRISTIN LIEBERMAN

Leaving Pasadena

The house we bought in Pasadena was not my first choice. It was small, overpriced, and had a tiny backyard, no pool. But it was charming, so when we went through our options, I remembered its garden, and the lion's head fountain in the postage-stamp-sized yard. "Look at it this way," I said to my husband. "It's already renovated. We'll stay a few years, sell it, and then move to a bigger house. By then, we'll have a family." It was a perfect house for two people, maybe three.

"Okay," he said. He looked down at the floor. He gave in too quickly. He was silent. It was not the way a lawyer—a big lawyer like he was—makes an important decision.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Nothing," he said.

"Can we afford it?"

"Yes," he said.

Something wasn't right, but I didn't push it. All I thought was this—the houses along the street were lovely, the yards plush, and flowered. Jacarandas lined the street—their purple flowers blossomed and when they fell the sweet, sticky petals twirled like lilac snow all along the road and in the yards.

I remember sitting cross-legged in my faded jeans and crisp white linen shirt alone on the cold, brown Mexican tiles in the family room waiting for the moving van to arrive—the wall of French windows where outside the lion's head fountain spilled water into the koi pond—the quiet sound of trickling water, and the deep breath I took in the January air. I knew—I just knew because of that room—I'd be happy there. I was hopeful then.

In 1991, you were an acceptable resident of Pasadena if you were a professional or the senior executive of a prosperous corporation. You were welcomed if you were a Catholic or Episcopalian. You were embraced if you were conservative or Republican. I was a liberal Democrat, but I was a lawyer—I drove a BMW. I had joined a local Episcopal Church. The neighborhood ladies didn't quite know what to do with me. Their discomfort over my job was apparent, but I was friendly, and I wore Laura Ashley dresses, pearls, and cardigans on the weekend. I was expecting a child.

I didn't know my life was suspect. I was happy, busy, about to become a mother, and I was the newest partner in a successful law firm. I was oblivious—I was a fool.

I was tanned, in my thirties, and happy. During the week, I wore sharp business suits in navy, camel, and black. I walked among the beautiful Huntington Gardens and its Library, lunched at Julienne, the gorgeous café on Mission Street, gloried in the sumptuous Sunday brunch at the stately old Huntington Hotel, and enjoyed gracious Lacey Park, within walking distance of my little house. My house was only a place to sleep, a place to have parties, and a safe neighborhood for my hypothetical children. Moving to Pasadena was not a political decision. There was no ideology to my geography.

On a Sunday afternoon when our son was one month old my husband came to me in the nursery. “I have something to tell you,” he said. “I was convicted of intentional failure to file my income taxes in January. It’s a felony conviction, and I’ve been placed on parole. I have to pay a fine, and pay the last seven years of my taxes with interest. I have to perform community service.”

“How did you keep it from me?” I asked. If the entire house had fallen down around us at that moment, I couldn’t have been more shaken. I couldn’t have been more surprised.

His hands were in his pockets, and he paced the room. “I had all of the documents sent to the office and I placed all of them in a locked drawer. What came to the house, I put it on top of the refrigerator, where you could not see it.”

He told me that his felony conviction was reported to the bar, and they had chosen to suspend him. The law firm found out, and there was a meeting scheduled at the firm, and he thought, correctly, that he was going to lose his job tomorrow. “That is the only reason I’m telling you now,” he said.

“Why didn’t the other partners tell me anything?”

“I told them not to tell you. I told them that I was working it all out.” He added, “Also, I haven’t had any money in years.”

I thought that this had to be a joke—because he made so much money as a named partner in a lucrative law firm—but the joke was on me. We had always kept our finances separate, I had always filed my taxes alone. I checked all of my accounts. Checks I had not written had been drawn on each account. Small sums, just enough to cover a credit card bill or make one mortgage payment, but consistently, for as long as we had been married.

Each day, I encountered another lie, another hidden debt my husband had accrued. Someone said that he was a gambler—I never knew the truth. The warm, generous, responsible man I thought I knew was someone who kept a secret life away from me. I was numb, not at all certain I could stay

in this marriage—it didn’t feel like a marriage anymore. I locked up my checks and credit cards. I put passwords on all of my accounts, and I made an appointment with a divorce lawyer.

I took the rest of my vacation time because I was told I had no more maternity leave by the firm, and I cried for the entire week, rocking my son in my arms, while my husband paced the floors downstairs. On Monday, with shaky hands I put on my sunglasses and returned to work.

The neighborhood ladies invited me for breakfast shortly after I returned to work. I welcomed their company—any solidarity or friendship was a comfort because I felt so lost, so overwhelmed. We met at the local café, and as I sat down, I knew something was not right. They told me that it was time for me to stay home with my child. I reminded them that I was a working mother, and that I had responsible childcare. “Maybe your husband should stay home for a while. Someone needs to bond with this child,” one finally said. She said it to be cruel, and my heart closed up.

“Maybe he should,” I said. I knew that by saying that I would no longer be invited to lunch, tea, or to baby showers, or even greeted in the street, but I did not care. I could not let them know what I was going through. I was vulnerable, and my trust had already been breached.

I left some money for the check, and I drove to work. I thought about their intentions. Did they want to steer me in that direction for their own comfort, or to shepherd me into the herd? Charity work, volunteering for schools, hosting dinners, and child rearing were the only proper callings in life for a Pasadena matron. This was never the life I intended for myself. I wondered for the first time in the three years why I had moved there.

I didn’t have much time to wonder, or make alternative plans either. Two months later, I was admitted to the hospital for brain surgery. After suffering from headaches, balance issues, and finally one-sided weakness, I discovered that I had a congenital mid brain cyst grown to the size of a golf ball paralyzing my right side. A day after surgery I had a hemorrhagic stroke. I was in speech, physical, and occupational therapy for the next year. When I recovered enough to walk, talk, and care for my eighteen month old child with help—when my husband had finished his community service, his suspension was lifted, and he had another job—I told him he could go.

It wasn’t until five years later, after I had divorced and remarried, and my new husband and I wanted to move with my son into a new house that I found out that the tax authorities still had a lien on my house in my ex-husband’s name. It took five years to sort it out, and to remove the lien. By then the housing market plunged and I was diagnosed with leukemia. We enrolled our children—along with my son we had our own boy-girl twins—

into private schools and bided our time. When the oldest graduated from high school, and the housing market rose, we decided it was finally time to move.

I lived in the same house in the same neighborhood for twenty-two years, and I survived it. I can count the things that I miss about it. I miss breakfast at Julianne, martinis at Smitty's, dinners at the Arroyo Steakhouse and lunches at the Parkway Grill. I miss the Pasadena Playhouse, the Norton Simon Museum, and the Pasadena Symphony. I miss the eclectic shopping along Colorado Avenue and the Rose Parade. I do not miss the mute neighbors or the parent cliques in the expensive private schools that my children attended. I do not miss being the sick, awkward mom, getting sicker. I do not miss Gucci, Louis Vuitton, or Armani suits. I definitely do not miss Chanel bags.

In the end, I was never part of the clan. I wore pearls, but I was through wearing pearls. I was tired of dressing up. When my husband was offered a good job out of state I said, "Yes. Give me Oregon."

I visited Oregon only once before I came to Corvallis to choose a new home. I had flown to Portland with my oldest son on a college visit two years before. He had liked the college, and the meandering branch of the Willamette River beside our hotel made him smile. "You and Dad should move here," he said. "I think the twins would like it."

I laughed. "I can't see Oregon happening in my life."

I couldn't see it happening in my life until it did.

I endured two painful surgeries within one month before my husband was due to start his new job in Oregon. "It will be two hard months. Will you be okay?" he asked.

"I have to be," I said. He kissed me and held me close. I was shaking—I wasn't sure I had the strength to survive so long without him. Day by day, I went about my business—I drove the twins to school, I went to the grocery store, I directed the stripping and staging of my house, and I interviewed and hired our movers. I sorted through photos, clothes, furniture, every item of our collective lives, and threw out some, gave away more, and kept the cherished items. During this time, I couldn't bend or lift. Sitting for any length of time was almost unbearable. It took a full month for me to sit upright comfortably, and to eat solid food again. I kept moving forward to Oregon and my new life. I found strength in leaving that I had not known in staying.

I found a secluded sofa where I rested while the house was being shown, inspected, and finally sold. At night I took pain medication, chemotherapy pills, and whatever else my medical team prescribed. After

homework was done, the dinner dishes were put away, and the twins were showered and safely tucked in bed, I slept and dreamed of cool Northwestern summers.

We remained in our house in Pasadena until June, long enough for my oldest son to come home from college in Connecticut to say good-bye to the only home he had ever known. I said good-bye to the medical professionals who knew me, who had seen me through years of therapies, surgeries, titrations of medications, and all of the intrepid clinical trials. I said good-bye to my true community, and for real friendships I had forged or serendipitously come into over the years. I would miss them, but it was not heart breaking to let go. I just let go. I had learned that life and love was centered in just letting go.

The day I left the house in Pasadena for good, I sat cross-legged in black yoga pants in the family room on the same cold tiles after the movers had left. Our children were running from room to room, checking out the empty house one last time. I stared out at the old lion's head fountain, and the tired, sick woman I had become spoke to the hopeful, foolish girl that had moved here so many years ago. "You survived," I said.

I've ended up in the kind of town I grew up in rural California. It was a community graced with cherry groves, cattle ranches, and swathes of fields peppered with poppies, perennials, shrubs and trees. Apricot, plum, and persimmon trees surrounded our white cottage of a home. Mint grew by the dripping water faucet in the backyard, stalks of rhubarb, and rows of grapevines tangled into one other, avocados and lilacs, and roses of every variety and color. A tall elm tree regally shaded me from the hot sun, and I practiced my saxophone with a makeshift music stand under those enormous branches. On Sunday mornings the white church across the way rang its bells loudly while I turned over stones looking for bugs in the green, grass yard.

Everyone in that small town knew their neighbors. People worked hard and helped one another as best they could. Many of my classmates were content to stay in this town for good, or find another small town somewhere else, while a few of us ventured out to the city. I bounded off to college and beyond, to the noise and excitement of everything a small town didn't offer me. I lived in one city after another until I married and planted roots in the cracks of suburban cement in Pasadena.

Along the rural highway leading to the Northwest forest where I now live lay acres of grassland, bales of harvested hay, forested mountains, horses and sheep. Next door to me there is an old farm, grandfathered into the gentrified neighborhood. The farm raises alpacas for their wool and goats for their milk and cheese.

A slight breeze fans and sways the trees—strange trees I have never seen before. While we had a postage stamp backyard in Pasadena—we now have two acres of land surrounding our house, an outside fireplace and a covered wooden swing. I watch a small herd of white-tailed deer amble through our backyard in the morning, and I receive an email warning of cougar sightings, and slaughtered fawns and doe. Owls hoot in the trees late at night.

The days are longer, quieter, and the northern light is brighter in summer, and Oregon grass awakens in early autumn rain. Every green grows greener, and all of the trees, the various trees—deciduous or coniferous—acquire a slippery sheen as the water lubricates their trunks and branches. In October it rained hard. Thunder and lightening ripped through the sky for hours. My children came home drenched in their tennis shoes and sweatshirts. They laughed, astounded by the downpour, and went to their rooms to change.

I watch through the front door window as cyclists, wearing muddled raincoats, nylon pants and helmets, pedal up a steep road in the rain. I wonder for a moment where they keep their raingear and why they are riding in the rain. Then I realize that even on a cloudless day they must be prepared for an unexpected storm. They do not let rain, thunder, or even lightening keep them from getting to their destination. I know then that I am like them, and that I will grow roots here, deeper than any I grew in Pasadena. I will pedal insulated with warmth and good humor through the rain of medication, infusions and time. Sometimes the sun will come out, and I will bask under warm and cloudless skies in this wild and tender land.

TEDDY NORRIS

Bedtime Story

For years she suffered from night terrors: visions of house fires brought her to our rooms, her eyes ablaze as she shook us awake. Her words crackled at the edges of our consciousness; her desperation seared through the daze of our dreams. Over time we understood that nothing could dissuade her; we'd stumble to our feet, drowsy obedient ghosts. Eventually less compliant we complained, "Mom, it's just a dream. Go back to sleep," but she could not believe us as we marched her back to bed, turning our backs on her wringing her hands in the dark.

Eventually her nights grew less unquiet, the rooms of her sleep merely spaces lacking stairs or doors, her dreams endless searches for china cups, birthstone rings, baby shoes. Then, their children grown, my parents left the farm, moved into town

where one winter night as slicing winds blew in an icy storm, Mom's weeping wakened Dad. Wild-eyed she roamed the house, repeatedly picked up the phone, would not be consoled. "Oh, Will, what if someone's house burned, in this cold!"

Before the sky had lost its ashy gray our former neighbor phoned to say there'd been a fire, in the night our farmhouse had burned. Later, local voices lowered to a hush recounting the current owner's luck, how he'd awakened just in time, so certain that his phone had rung.

In sleep now, when I see my mother's agitated face, I soothe her, listen till her eyes grow still and dark as the livestock pond, then wake before her hands become swallows darting in the light.

GRACE C. OCASIO

Granddaddy Graham

The story is family lore:
how you lifted a splinter from Ronald's foot
after he'd jumped, at age two,
from tiled bathroom to his room's pinewood floor.

There's also the other story—
how I, a six-month-old,
shriveled up,
thin as a mashed pea.

Mom bundled me in layers of quilts,
flew me down to Newberry,
where you examined me, no doubt,
probably prodded with your stethoscope.

You concocted some remedy—
perhaps oatmeal with pureed peaches and cod liver oil.
Whatever your hands brewed, it worked.
I returned to New York heavy as half a dozen cantaloupes.

The first visit to Newberry I recall—age ten.
I absorbed you from two chair rows away—
this figure in a white plaid suit
collecting your plaque for community service.

Never even sat on your lap,
never fingered your necktie,
felt your hands press into my flesh
placing me on a slide.

In your formal living room,
your portrait loomed
black and white with a stare
stern enough to incinerate a heart's bloom.

What I wanted—
a shiver in your sigh,
the sound of cicadas in your steps,
a smile subtle as a mouthful of lemon pie.

One day, before God sent you out West,
you crooned of a boyhood adventure—
hunting for a bull's balls,
an aphrodisiac?

I could hardly believe these words
gushed like a waterfall
from your mouth,
sprinkling my ears.

No, I did not know you
until you opened yourself
like a desk drawer,
let me pull out your maps and charts.

I needed you then.
You became the man
who wrestled the sky,
bruised its thighs.

SIMON PERCHIK

✱

With no ink and the nib
learning to dry
as shadows and a dark room

—what you stroke are the words
before they turn black
then emptiness, then

yet her name
is not something you dig for
then row by row

so this page on each side
stays damp from dirt
covered with fingers

—you almost point
though nothing moves
not these walls, not

what would reach around
hid from your arms
—this pen and in the margin

a wooden handle
squeezed tight—drop by drop
swallowed the world.

RICHARD KING PERKINS II

Brown Duck

Tomorrow, in the latest evening,
an unremarkable brown duck will return
from a night foraging,
expecting to find her eggs just as she left them.

Taken to ground, she settles upon her intention,
hardly to blink for all the next day.
She'll never think about the man
who rushed from his house in a hailstorm
to cover her nest with a window-well protector
until the hooks of possible destruction had withdrawn.

Later, as she fidgets and squirms,
trying to keep her hatchlings innocent
beneath her for a few hours more,
the man is pleased.

And when she leads her young to the river,
she has no time for good-byes or thank-yous,
cannot consider miracles or moments of transcendence—

or what hope means to a human being
and how thankful we are for it
even when there is no one left to thank.

CAITLIN B. STUCKEY

Father's Love

He tracked sand into the waves and drifted from shore and failure, limp-bodied, along the water's surface that lulled him down and back up with blooming and ebbing swells, until at last, he slipped under into cool azure and quiet where the bubbles of his sighs rose to silhouettes of fish and receding light, and he lolled weightlessly in the current, tugged down from soul toward darkness, a silent siren that promised release from the world he had watched grow up without her, when suddenly, he choked on wet and salt—*I'm sorry*—and saw her face—*I'm sorry*—and remembered the light overhead where he belonged so that she could not possibly be alone without him searching for her, and as he clawed from sucking depths toward the sea's surface while all fell from him, sound and sensation dead, stricken that for those selfish hours he had given up, he thrashed past creatures to cut through their shadows that had waved him farewell, and as his hands grasped for the surface, now just overhead, luminous and dancing in the late day sun, he darted upward. *I'm coming, Baby. I'm coming.*

HELENE PILIBOSIAN

Clam Chowder Manners

Interpreting the evenings
that hang over metropolitan Boston
like a constant crowded canvas
explains a wealth of summer
as nothing else can.
Further, entering a plague of doors —
Copley Place, Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston Public Library —
hardly leaves room for packages
that envy the subway.

How will we run
our marathon with space,
with streets of repetition,
with the embrace of cars,
with fear of headlines?
Will we greet each other
like newspaper reporters,
like photographers for fun,
like stretchers carrying air waves
rather than victims?

The agenda of digital confusion
repeats its many requests,
bested by double miles
when town abuts a city
with no known likeness.
I offer a smile
as an act of faith
to narrow the core of fact.
Forget-me-nots cover
the thought of that gesture.

But I forgot clam chowder manners
on Boylston street that day
when the marathon exploded.
My memory has dulled
around the edges of the names.

DIANA PINCKNEY

Yeats Exhibit, Downstairs National Library, Dublin

Walls ripple with birds, a screen
of words, the lake of lines mirror swans. On a bench
a young man moves his lips to the music

of words, a voice reading *The Wild Swans*
at Coole. The man's coat, his wavy black hair
and profile, classic Yeats. He owns this space

I dare not enter. The swans at Coole, the reflections
of water his alone. No windows, no sun
light Yeats' world. A hall of photographs winds

to Maude, to Georgie, young and bright on the wall,
Isolde shimmers. Here's Ben Bulben, there's the tower,
home to no one, not lover,

not wife. Letter boxes, poems with lines crossed
through. Blots of brown on pages, covering
desks. Inkpots, Ouija boards, tarot cards.

From the room of scrolled poems, a voice
calls me back to the bench, now empty,
my young Yeats flown with the swans.

Rolling lines of *Easter, 1916* cover rubble, men who fall and jerk
across a screen of bloodied horses. Next,
the shelled Post Office, rebels lined up.

One holds a flag, flapping like a white bird. I'm left with
a drumroll of names. Who can know
the present from the past?

DIANA REAVES

How to Greet Me This Time

Just throw the door
wide open. Free
me, take my long
green coat. Then kiss
my cheek once for
propriety,
again to say
I know, I know.
Don't smile and hold
my shoulders when
I can't look
into your eyes;
don't cradle my
wet face, so round
in your hands. I've
been held enough.
Instead, escort
me to the drinks
in the sunroom.
If I decide
to walk the yard—
the ground, my dark
beginning—let
me go, let me.
I'll find my way
to the basket-swing
beneath the oaks
and notice how
its lonesome sway
in morning sun
is everything
I've wanted, tried
to say but can't.

STEPHEN REILLY

Resting in Peace

The nurse said anything you want. You said scotch.
The nurse's face grew heavy with regulations.
The last one for the road. Hey, you weren't driving.
A quick trip to the package store cured only your thirst.
We told you how we wanted to send you to Ireland,
and you said that you'd take the cash. We all laughed.
You said your goodbyes. Breaths diminished into nothing.
This is not what I want to remember. Think back to
a younger time, when our neighbor, a hunter, hung
a deer carcass from a tree. You knew the man well
and told me it wasn't meat but blood he hunted.
(This was when your words weighed more than Gospel.)
I did learn you were right at an evening barbecue.
He slurred his stories about crossing the Rhine, house
to house searches, the last look in a young German's eyes.
But to my boy's mind, this was what I wanted,
tales of the Pacific and your exploits,
your adventures on the deck of a PT, something,
anything to take back to my friends playing stickball.
It was never a sport for you. You did tell me how
the mind's eye becomes a bull's-eye with every tracer.
The Japanese were serious. Things got real, real fast.
Mac Arthur, you thought, returned but never counted
the bodies as carefully as the medals, and you would
always mock those movies in which no soldier expressed
the sweat of staying alive. War is easier on backlots.

Only a sense of duty pulled you out of Brooklyn pool halls
the day after Pearl. Remember how we had our own war
over Vietnam? Armed with adolescent arrogance,
I asked you where was the flag? Saigon no Pearl.
Westmoreland, a tin Mac Arthur. What duty is there
in mercenary games where lives are surrendered like pawns?
That war, like all wars, ended, and we made our peace.

What surprised you was cancer. How could a tumor attack
and never be felt? The size of a lemon, doctors said.
The operation, those months that followed, left you more
and more like a veteran of Bataan. Each breath hungrier
than the last. Your battle no different than many others,
and you saw your cancer as a weapon in your enemy's hands,
standing close, hunkered down like a sniper above your bed.
Each breath a victory. The fear, of course, was there,
but you allowed yourself no fear of fears
and hugged what you had tightly, even making a lover's quip
to your wife. She wiped the perspiration from your face.

W. SCOTT THOMASON

The Lost Art of Betamax Repair

Daddy's salvation came in the form of a big-haired and dull-eyed Sally Struthers. She stared out of the TV set and asked if he wanted to make more money, answering her own question with a "We all do!" like she was delivering the punch line on a sitcom. She expounded the merits of study-at-home professional training while Daddy mouthed the list of certificates scrolling beside her. He grabbed a pencil and paper as she instructed, scribbling down the toll-free number. "How could you not trust Sally Struthers, even if she has put on a few?" he asked as he reached for the phone on the den wall. "1-800-445-7200." He read the number out as the uneven clicks of the rotary dial indicated his conversion to the Church of Career Certificate Correspondence Courses.

Daddy could fix anything seemingly by instinct, but there was no paper on a wall saying so. He understood how the pieces of a machine worked together, and he could restore harmony to a mechanism almost by touch alone. He worked most of my early life at the tobacco factory in Faith Rock until it was closed down by a group of suits in New York. He pieced together handyman jobs for a while, but a lot of people did the same work. Then Sally Struthers appeared on television offering freedom, something he could call his own.

Daddy settled on the Betamax VCR repair course, partly because it was discounted, but mostly because no one else repaired those machines. "I need something that nobody knows how to do, so they can't tell me how to do it," was how he explained it. He passed all of the tests even though we didn't own a VCR. What the booklets didn't tell him was that most folks were switching to VHS and within a few years only a handful of people on the planet would own a Beta player, with very few of those living in near us in northwest North Carolina. Still he was able to piece together business by making house calls by traveling neighboring counties and into nearby Winston-Salem. He salvaged every serviceable part and found what else he needed through flea markets, Goodwill, and the occasional pile of trash. He had a window of a few years where he got what he wanted, where he was the only person who could do what needed to be done.

Shortly after his certificate came in the mail, he brought home a second-hand Betamax player. It was ours for the moment—over the months

a series players would rotate in and out of the spot beside the television, each coming from a customer who surrendered and switched to VHS, each having a feature Daddy thought made it superior to its predecessor. But that first player is the one I remember, a plain silver box with no clock, no blinking lights. Daddy hooked it up to the TV and handed me a tape. "It goes in there, this side up," he said, turning my hand so the tape would load properly into the deck. There was a click and a low hum, and then Daddy recorded the opening credits of the afternoon Andy Griffith rerun. He hit stop, then rewind, the gears whirling fast until halting with an abrupt pop. He pointed to the play button and told me to push. "Now watch this," he said. The tape clicked and hummed, and the credits from moments before replayed on the screen, the familiar whistling and walk to the fishing hole intact just as they had been at five o'clock.

"How does it work?" I asked.

"Well...you know, the books I read talked about things called scan lines and analog signals. But what these machines really do is turn tape into image. I like the sound of that, don't you?" I nodded that I did, standing before the machine until dinner, rewinding and replaying the same 30 seconds of television.

During those years I would sometimes awaken at night to a faint light coming down the hallway. I would sneak out of bed and peak at Daddy leaning over a Beta player in his workshop, an old school desk in a converted doublewide closet that actually was the laundry room. A small lamp with an adjustable neck was his light. At first the machine was one brought home for repairs, but as the months passed it became a stray given up for VHS. At night he would sit and tinker over the metal box, tightening connections and replacing rollers in a machine that no one wanted back. I would sit in the doorframe and watch him calmly work, his movements easy and small, until I fell asleep against the wall, waking up in my bed the next morning.

Daddy started taking me on service calls when I was eleven. Though he never said as much, I think he felt a responsibility to pass down the art of Betamax repair.

Anyone's den was our classroom. I learned how to open the box, check the heads and connections, and untangle tape jams. Parts were named, mechanisms were explained, and possible problem areas were identified. "Sometimes the tape actually gets caught up in the mechanism, but usually it's static electricity. Just stick your fingers underneath the cassette and into

the holes. Then turn counter clockwise to get the tape back in.” It sounded simple yet his fingers worked meticulously threading tape with smooth motion that I couldn’t find in my hands.

The workings of a Betamax machine seemed natural to him. He would screw and unscrew, remove parts and make adjustments. “You should always clean the head while you’re in, but only with a cloth, not a paper towel. Never move the cloth up and down, but rotate the head into the cloth, like this.” He would slowly push the tape head through his cloth, then look up to see if I understood. I couldn’t remember it all, but I always nodded that I did.

Daddy saw something in the gears and wires that I couldn’t. To me the inside of a Betamax machine remained a collection of mismatched screws, wheels that resembled crème-filled cookies, and plastic pieces shaped like the dialogue boxes from comic strips, all set against green electrical boards. Red, blue, and white cords hovered above like an interstate cloverleaf. I did not inherit Daddy’s touch; I could replace parts, but the machines did not respond to me like they did to him. What Daddy had was a feel for repair, an intuition that can’t be taught.

Above it all, Daddy believed in these players. “Betamax players won’t die. I don’t get why people switch to VHS—those things will kick out on you after a couple of years. But if you keep the belts and rollers changed and the heads clean, a Beta will last damn near forever.” Beta was dying because people wanted the longer recording time offered by VHS, so they could put an entire week’s worth of shows on one tape. “Here’s what it is,” he would say. “People want convenience. They don’t want quality. Just because a player records 6 hours doesn’t mean the recording’s any good.” He would be looking towards me when he said this, not down into the open box, but not at me, either. There was something I needed to see, but couldn’t. “Just because you can do something doesn’t mean you should.”

Daddy’s most regular customer was Wendell Pittman, who possessed a knack at messing up a Betamax machine akin to Daddy’s ability to fix it. I was told that Mr. Pittman had been a strong man earlier in life, but by the time I started going on service calls he was reduced to loose folds of flesh sagging from too many trendy diets. He reminded me of an abandoned couch that Daddy had tried to reupholster one weekend; Mama made him put it out on the curb with a free sign safety-pinned to the back.

Daddy counted on Mr. Pittman’s business long after market forces had stripped away his other customers. Mr. Pittman wouldn’t switch to

VHS because he needed the Beta player for watching movies made with his Betamovie camera. The Betamovie camera was for taping Westley the Westie.

Mr. Pittman made a small fortune selling off stock in the tobacco factory where my father had worked, right before it closed. He and his wife then took up dog showing. They entered Westley into local and regional events; while he collected a few runner-up trophies, he never won any titles. He was never close to national. Still, after each competition the Pittmans showed their friends the movies of every victory that Westley almost attained. The parties were held at their big house in the subdivision that had grown up just outside of town, sheltering residents from the property taxes of neighboring Forsyth County.

My first trip to the Pittman's was before one of these parties, on a summer afternoon when Daddy had been called in to rescue the film of one of Westley's near-triumphs from a malfunctioning head or a burst of static electricity. We went to the rear of the house where Mr. Pittman met us at the sliding patio door.

He didn't speak, his mouth running down his jaw. Neither man offered to shake hands. Daddy pointed a thumb to me and said, "Mr. Pittman, this is my son, E.P." There was no response to the introduction. Before we were motioned inside, Mr. Pittman held up his hand and tapped a shoe against the toes of Daddy's work boots. Daddy paused, and then removed his boots, leaving them on the deck. I knew to do the same.

The den was almost as large as our house, lined with white shag carpet and walled in stone. There was a bar in the corner and a long leather couch that curved in a U shape around an octagonal table. The walls were hung with paintings of children holding anonymous dogs; I had seen those same pictures at Sears. The large mantel and hearth matched the wall stone. Above the fireplace was one picture that wasn't purchased—a portrait of Westley standing on a pedestal, with a gold cup and blue ribbon testifying to the imaginative powers of the artist.

Beside the fireplace sat a wood-encased 45-inch television. Matching speakers were on each side. On top of the TV was the Betamax player, sitting in a hot spot even I knew not to put it. Daddy unhooked the machine from behind and sat on the floor, holding it in his lap as he began to open the case. While he did so, he asked Mr. Pittman what was wrong.

I never heard the exact problem, for as soon as Daddy spoke a high-pitched staccato bark came from upstairs, followed by the scurry of paws on the ceiling. There was a stairwell behind us that lead to a place I couldn't

fully see, and with the scrape of an opening door the barking quickly became louder as Westley the Westie charged down.

Westley encircled us with barks and low belly growls. He jumped up on the back of my legs, his manicured nails leaving a scattering of designer scratches. He ran over the open-top Beta player in Daddy's lap. He pushed up on his hind legs and attempted a clumsy walk before landing back on his forepaws and encircling us again.

Mr. Pittman laughed. "If we don't let him down here to meet people he'll bark all day."

Westley took Daddy's Philips head screwdriver behind the big leather couch, returning empty-mouthed to run full speed through a handful of rollers Daddy had sat on the floor. Westley grabbed one of them, and Daddy stuck his finger in between the dog's teeth, hooking the part from the back and pulling it out, avoiding Westley's nip with the same precision with which he repaired players.

"Your dog might choke on these parts, Mr. Pittman," was all he said.

"We need this the player for tonight," was the response.

Westley then ran behind the couch again and emerged with the screwdriver, dropping it in the middle of the floor. He ran to Daddy's workbag, lifted his leg, and spritzed the side.

Mr. Pittman acknowledged this act by yelling up the stairs, "Wanda, he pee-peed." The door at the top of the stairs opened, and Westley charged back up, disappearing as it shut.

Daddy took a cleaning cloth and wiped the side of the bag. As soon as he was done Mr. Pittman said, "Don't drop that on the carpet."

Daddy shifted his attention to the player. Daddy motioned for me to come over. I knelt beside him, looking up the stairs to see if Westley would return. Daddy poked his finger into the tape compartment.

"The doors on these models cause static electricity, so sometimes the tape will jam up even after you've fixed everything else." He looked at Mr. Pittman standing beside the couch, looking down on us. "Replacement door mechanisms like this are hard to find. Until one comes along we'll just have to keep untangling. Now—you remember how to undo a jam?" I wrapped my fingers around the cassette, aware of Mr. Pittman's eyes on my back.

"This tape can't get ruined, Dew," he said. "This is the one where he almost got third."

"It won't," Daddy said. He looked at me. "You know what to do."

I slid my fingers under the tape and found the holes. I turned, but went the wrong way, the tape rolling into the jam. Daddy tapped my hand,

and I reversed direction, feeling the tape tighten as it found its way back into the cassette.

“Like it never happened,” Daddy said. He reassembled the box and hooked up the player, a picture of Westley emerging on the wood-paneled television. He stopped the player and ejected the tape as further proof that it had survived. Mr. Pittman came over and took the tape, holding it up for inspection before moving to put it on top of one of the speakers.

Daddy stuck out his hand. “Mr. Pittman, not there. The magnetic field of the speakers can erase it.”

Mr. Pittman lowered the cassette to his side. “I don’t want to have to switch to VHS,” was his response.

Out on the deck we put on our shoes. As we did Daddy looked up to Mr. Pittman standing in the door. “I’ll be needing my payment for today, Mr. Pittman, and for the other week, if you don’t mind.”

Mr. Pittman looked up at the sky, as something unusual was flying overhead. “Don’t you worry, now. You’ll get your pay, Dew.” Daddy stood up and led me to the truck. What I learned through visits over the next year was that this request for payment was part of their ritual, and that a check would arrive in the mail a month or so later. I discovered that’s how it always had been: Daddy would do the work, and then Mr. Pittman would take his time sending in the payment, as if to remind everyone of who stood where.

Daddy should have been happy when Westley the Westie died. It was about a year later, and the dog got an obituary in the Faith Rock Skipper. “I don’t think this much could be written about me, and I live in human years,” Daddy said without taking his eyes off the page. “Can you believe they’re hosting a visitation at their house next weekend? They’re asking for flowers.”

“You should go, Dew. It’s good business.” Momma gave me a wink over breakfast while Daddy’s eyes were still stuck on the paper. “I’ll make a Jell-O dessert and you can take a card asking for your last few payments.” When I suggested that Mr. Pittman may not be in the mood to receive a bill, Momma looked at me like I had peed on the floor. Daddy squinted over the edge of the paper and kept talking. “Do you think that someone like Pittman would ever send a card if our dog died? Hell, if one of us died?”

“Our dog is dead, Dew.”

“I rest my case.” He kept reading. “Lord help us all—they’re showing those movies. They’re calling it a memorial screening.”

“You’re going to be there, then. See if he will pay you right there for once.”

Daddy didn’t respond immediately. The delayed payments were a sore spot between them. He was still looking at the paper in a way that I now know means he wasn’t reading a word. He finally folded it up and said, “I hope there’s a hell for that kind of dog.”

“Maybe you should head Pittman off, and call him to see if he needs the player checked. Give him condolences, and then ask him for your money.”

“That seems awfully rude, Mary Catherine—”

“You’re not the one being rude, Dew.”

I looked at them both and said what I thought was obvious: “Maybe now that the dog is dead he won’t need to film anything, and you won’t have to go over there so much.”

Daddy paused for what seemed to me to be a long time. He looked at my mother, then back to me, before laying down the newspaper and pushing his chair back as he stood up. “Yeah, I guess not.”

Mr. Pittman called Daddy the morning of the memorial, saying he couldn’t get the player to rewind. We needed to come early that afternoon so Westley’s films could play through the evening. As we were getting ready to go Daddy’s Plymouth Arrow had a flat tire. Daddy called Mr. Pittman to let him know we would be arriving late, and we didn’t get there until the gathering had already begun.

The ride over was silent. We had to park down the road from the house, as the driveway and the nearby shoulders were already lined with cars. As he pulled the truck onto the side of the road I asked him what I had been fumbling through my mind since that first visit.

“Why do you never make him pay you?”

Daddy stared at the road, as if slowing down the truck to park required the same concentration as working on a Betamax player. “Pittman’s one of my best customers, and there just aren’t a lot of them left. Your mama is right—I should ask him. But some things are only done one way, and changing them ain’t as easy as talking.” Whatever else he might have said disappeared as the gravel shoulder crunched beneath the slowing truck. The only other thing he said to me before we were inside was “Watch the mirrors” as we passed by the line of Cadillacs and Buicks outside the house.

We heard the voices before we reached the deck. The patio door where Mr. Pittman usually met us was open, and people were mingling inside and out despite the sticky summer evening. They held small cups and plates

close to their chests as they stood around a long, covered table set up inside that held punch and finger food. Daddy pulled off his boots and I followed, out of habit. The voices continued as we entered, but the eyes fell heavy on our backs. Daddy moved forward like he didn't mind, but I couldn't help but notice everyone's slick and shiny shoes.

Another table was set up near the rear of the den, covered in flowers and cards. Beside it, on a white faux-marble pedestal, stood Westley. He surveyed the crowd, with his runner-up cups and participation ribbons at his paws. It took a taxidermist to make him quiet and still, and his brand new glassy eyed-stare made him look like he could join Sally Struthers in her correspondence school commercial.

Daddy unhooked the Beta as usual, putting it on the floor to remove the outer case. I was too busy looking back into those glass eyes to hear what he was pointing out. Daddy was going through the inspection when Mr. Pittman appeared, wearing a black suit.

"It wouldn't rewind earlier, when you were supposed to be here," was his greeting. "And tonight's tape is stuck in there. Has been all afternoon."

Daddy peered into the box, as I looked around the room at the guests ignoring us like a piece of consignment furniture. "First thing to do is remove the cassette." He reached beneath it like so many times before, slowly backing the tape out of the jam. He lifted it out of the box and inspected it. Mr. Pittman came to stand behind us, and Daddy handed him the cassette. I looked at his loose fitting suit, the drape of the fabric matching the hang of his skin. Mr. Pittman put the tape down on one of the speakers as Daddy inspected the inside of the player.

"E.P.," Daddy said, regaining my attention. "Here's why it won't rewind. It's not going to fast forward, either." He touched his finger to a white plastic wheel covered with a piece of rubber that looked like a small tire. "This wheel turns the take-up reel and the supply-reel. The rubber casing is what's wrong. It dried up and can't grip anymore. Eventually it grinds itself out." He slipped his finger underneath the lip of the rubber tire and popped it off. He reached into his bag and pulled out a sack of rubber grommets. He opened his utility knife and handed it to me. "You can't hardly find the casings anymore, but a standard grommet will do. Just split it down the middle, like you're slicing a biscuit. Then slip it over the wheel and it's as good as new."

He put down the lid of the player to use as a flat surface. He held the grommet steady with his right hand as I pressed the blade lengthwise into the rubber. It wouldn't give, and as I pressed harder, Mr. Pittman interjected,

“Dew, this player has to work tonight.” The blade slipped out at the boom of his voice, and ran between Daddy’s thumb and index finger. At first there was just a cut through pink skin, then a sudden change to red as blood ran onto the lid.

Daddy pulled a clean cloth from the bag and pressed it over the wound. Mr. Pittman interrupted. “Don’t let that get on the carpet. Or on the player. It’ll ruin it.”

Daddy wrapped the cloth between his fingers, covering the wound. “A little blood won’t hurt one of these machines.” Mr. Pittman furrowed his brow.

Daddy turned to me. “I’m not going to be any good for delicate work tonight, but you can do it.” He patted me on the shoulder with his left hand.

It looked easy enough, but the grommet wouldn’t fit fully over the wheel. One section or the other kept popping up slightly, but it had to be snug in order for the mechanism to work. My fingers pressed and tried to shape the casing, but they were clumsy and unsure. Daddy watched my work. When I thought I had got it, he would point to a spot that hadn’t been fitted. Mr. Pittman moved from his spot beside the couch to stand directly over us.

“Dew — this thing has to be able to play tonight. Everyone’s waiting.”

“We had a little accident, Mr. Pittman, but we’re almost there.”

“I don’t want to have to switch to VHS.”

Daddy looked at him for longer than usual. “You’re not going to like VHS as much as people say you will.” Mr. Pittman tightened his forehead again, the folds of flesh bunching. I kept fitting the grommet as they looked at each other, finally feeling it fit tightly around the wheel.

“There you go,” Daddy said. He plugged the player back into the wall. I pressed the rewind and fast forward buttons, watching the empty reels engage, a clean click and hum indicating proper function. I reattached the case and returned the player to the top of the television.

Daddy stood up, still squeezing the cloth against his hand, and turned to Mr. Pittman. “That tape should play now.” Mr. Pittman bent his lips into what may have been a smile, but looked more to me like a shape formed by the failure of flesh to properly grip his head. He pulled the tape out of its case and put it in the player. As I packed up the tools I heard the click of the loading mechanism engaging the tape. We passed through the guests and out the back door.

As we stood on the deck putting on our shoes, Mr. Pittman began to introduce the tape to the crowd. We were heading off the deck when suddenly stopped and began yelling towards us.

"It's fouled up! Get Dew Vinson back here! Someone get him back!"

Daddy slowly stepped back into the door, boots on, and the crowd parted to let him through. I followed. Mr. Pittman met us halfway.

"It's all fouled up, Dew. The tape's erased. You erased the tape."

"I'm sure it's just a malfunction, Mr. Pittman." He pulled the screwdriver out of the bag and motioned for me to reopen the box. As I did so, Daddy said, "It's probably a jam. I don't see how the tape could've been erased with you holding it."

I didn't say anything. I took the top off of the box as instructed. Daddy checked for a jam but the tape was properly loaded. He ejected it and pushed it back again, hitting play. The wheels hummed in harmony but the screen was blank.

"You erased it," Mr. Pittman said.

Daddy stared into the screen, shaking his head. He rested his bandaged right hand on the edge of the player and watched the tape advance from above. Mr. Pittman stood cross-armed right behind him, also staring down into the topless player and watching every tiny move, the two of them searching for something inside of the open box.

"Whatever you told him to do erased the tape, Dew." It was the first time he had acknowledged my presence.

"The tape wasn't even in there when he was working, Mr. Pittman."

"You let your boy do a man's job, and look what happened." He looked at me, then back to Daddy. "Your only job is not to ruin things, and you can't even do that."

"It's my fault, not my boy's, whatever happened. Tapes are magnetic. Sometimes they get erased. It's all part of how these machines work."

Daddy stopped the player and ejected the tape. He was about to push it back in for another test when Mr. Pittman pushed his injured hand off the top of the Betamax. He pointed to the door as the room crowded in to watch. Daddy and I gathered up the tools and walked through the low, whispering hums and out to the deck. Mr. Pittman was right behind us.

Daddy turned around and looked him in the face. "Mr. Pittman, I'm sorry. Sometimes these things happen."

"Don't think you're getting paid for screwing everything up."

"You know I never charge for anything I can't fix."

"As far as I'm concerned I don't owe you a dime. For this or for anything. I'm going out tomorrow and buying a VHS player. The best one they have at Sears. Now you and your boy get off my deck."

"This wasn't my boy's fault." Daddy paused. "And old jobs have nothing to do with this. That work was already done—and done right."

Mr. Pittman looked him square in the eye. "You're not getting anything because you don't deserve it. Now get off of my deck, Dew."

Daddy took a deep breath. "Not without what you owe me. Wendell."

Mr. Pittman glanced back at the house, where his guests were pretending not to watch through the open patio doors. Mr. Pittman raised a hand and bounced a droopy-flesh fist off the side of Daddy's jaw. Daddy rolled his tongue around his mouth before Mr. Pittman hit him again.

There was a pause, not long, but time enough for Daddy to look into Mr. Pittman's eyes, to confirm the moment. Daddy puffed his cheeks, dodged the third blow and glanced a left-handed punch off of his opponent's head. Mr. Pittman still had the tape, and he swung it at Daddy, who caught the cartridge with his good hand and pulled it away. Mr. Pittman lunged to get it back. In the ensuing tug-of-war the tape got pulled from the cassette. The two men locked up each other's arms and got tangled, rolling against the rail of the deck to the murmured approval of the crowd.

Once they separated, Mr. Pittman grabbed the cassette. The tug-of-war began again, with Pittman leaning backwards to pull against Daddy, who released the cartridge. Pittman fell against the railing and tried one more wild swing. Daddy stepped aside and landed a hard punch with his bandaged hand right between the eyes. Mr. Pittman smacked the deck, the tape unspooling across the boards.

No one said a word. The guests were, for the first time, as authentically silent as Westley on the pedestal. They let their host lie on his back, staring up at the sky. Daddy rubbed his injured hand before saying, "I guess we can call it even."

As we were getting in the Arrow at the end of the street we could hear Mr. Pittman cry out, "I'm getting a VHS! The best one they have at Sears! I'm switching to VHS!"

We sat in the truck for a moment before Daddy finally spoke. "Mom's gonna be mad I didn't get that money."

"He put the tape on the speakers," I said.

"What?"

"While you were working—he set the tape on the speakers by the TV."

Daddy laughed. "Well. He never did listen." He kept smiling. "He'll get exactly what he deserves out of VHS." He didn't say anything else on the drive home. It was the end of the Betamax days. He switched to general handyman work, picking up enough jobs to let the laundry room go back to its original purpose.

A summer ago I cleaned out the laundry room. Against the wall, adjacent to the old school desk, was a stack of Betamax players and tapes,

covered with a towel and capped with a box of detergent. I got out the top player, sat it on the desk, and plugged it in where the lamp used to be. No TV was needed. It powered up and I inserted one of the tapes. It didn't matter what was on it. I pressed play, then fast forward, then rewind. The familiar clicks and hums rose from the box, coupled with a faint squeak, the sound of dried out rubber beginning to grind itself out. I thought about going to a hardware store and buying a few grommets, splitting them in half, and replacing the casings. But I just let the machine play, sitting at Daddy's old desk, eyes closed, listening to the sound of tape turning into image.

STEPHEN R. ROBERTS

Secrets of Grocery Store Remodeling

I wonder why the pesticides sign is above
the aisle that shelves bread and peanut butter
at the grocery store, so I ask the store employee.
She just asked me if I'm finding everything
that I need during their major remodeling effort
to make the experience more pleasant for shoppers.
She knows that I know it's pre-planned by specialized
marketing tricksters hired to sell more product.

She tells me, the pesticides are not really there,
just the sign that's been moved to its new location.
The poisons are still on aisle nine, six aisles over.
And the bread is indeed under the pesticides sign,
but not to worry. All shelves are being scrubbed
down with strong cleansers and stiff bristle brooms
like those used out back on the new dumpsters,
that are guaranteed odor resistant and rodent proof.

I'm not sure if I feel better about the hunger pangs
now ripping around my stomach like the cattle grinder
backstage in the meat department. So I move toward
what used to be the fancy cheeses and delicate crackers.
Though I might find them on aisle three, between razors
and deodorant sticks. Who really knows, with the store
improvement program going full throttle, and the deli guy
frantically waving me into the refurbished liquor section.

NICOLE SAXTON

Sex With a Poet

Flames dance on the candle in the night.
Stars leaping out of the galaxy pierce sheer window shades.
The weight of our animalistic lust without sin,
ankles deep in examining ones passion.

Sheets become paper, limbs form into utensils.
Stanzas demand to be written, labors of literature.
Your lips stroke my skin like a paintbrush on canvas.
Our bare flesh meet, melt into one another.
The heat unlocks the music of unspoken poetry.
Moans, we talk with our souls.

Bodies twisted, intertwining, enjambed beneath
sheets of passion, the composition of reiterating literature,
a language understood by us poets.
Your rhythmical beat compels nerves to quiver.
My back arches like mountains as I reach my peak,
dripping like snow sliding down an avalanche.

Each time we create, the piece is more indulging.
Unwritten poems hang in the air as we dress,
awaiting the next encounter.
For one knows a poem is truly never finished.

MAUREEN SHERBONDY

Pining for Old Lovers

He desires a perpetual state
of yearning, pining
for spring in winter,
then wanting winter in summer.

How fickle
the chorus sings.

But he does not hear
lyrics or notes,
nor does he care.

Desire is strongest
when longing for ghosts.

MATTHEW J. SPIRENG

Calling in the Wild Bird

Only so many nails to pull, cranky
and groaning from the posts, thirty years
resting, wood and steel welded in a way,
though the crow bar served to extract them.

Then the wild turkey answered, down
from the woods as if the rasp
of nails being drawn were a turkey itself
calling. A few more to go and I'd be done,

fence posts rid of metal, holes and rust-colored
stains on weathered wood where nails had been,
rotted rails tossed on the brush pile
and somewhere a turkey waiting.

DONNA D. VITUCCI

Eagle River

We love our children, but this was before children. This was when we were children, when there were three of us, when there was nothing but time to walk and comb our open fingers through the thigh-high grass, when there was little yet to recover, or recover from.

In the back room Lynn and Angie planned to sleep in the double bed brought down from Grandpa's attic. It tore our mother to have to request it from the old man—she hated asking anybody for anything—but this was her first house, *ever*, and what room for our small family. Two bedrooms! Suddenly a world of expansion, suddenly a world of too little furniture.

Our mother clenched the dish towel to her apron as Daddy and his old man scraped the headboard against the doorframe. *The bumblers*, she called them later, but right then she sizzled air through her teeth, wincing, withholding her cautions. Our mother was always hemming herself in. Come holidays and birthdays she devised no wish list. At the table when she asked you to pass the salt she said it with pardon curbing her voice. The times we girls crowded in around her legs—which we often did, we relished the feel of her skin polishing ours—she'd absorb up in herself like a pill bug. An unfamiliar car in the drive spooked her. Were she able to shrink I think she would, even flinching from the Fourth of July sparklers Daddy handed us. Whatever her reason, I don't believe she once cast votes in a public election.

Daddy and Grandpa returned from down the hall, shed of their burden, each mopping their necks and hairlines with their handkerchiefs. Grandpa said to our mother, "Free to ya's, Dolly, for a cabbage boil." He had a wicked wink, and a sty in that one eye. Red patches roughed the fair skin of his face, his neck and his bald spot.

Mother nodded at Daddy. She said, "Seth," prompting him to grab from under the sink a brown bottle he passed to his father. They shared it like a settlement, the two lip-smacking and sighing as our mother spun on her heels, her eyes not resting on any one of us, then zooming in on a dish from the drainer she plucked up to dry. Angie moaned she hated cabbage of all sorts and Lynn made the upchuck sound. We occupied various spots of the kitchen, the big house suddenly swirling with grudge, suddenly not so large.

Grandpa said, “Well, look what’s thrown back in the face of charity.”

We weren’t used to visitors, never having had space before to host. We maybe didn’t have such good manners. Our own grandfather’s scaly elbows denting the kitchen oil cloth fascinated and repelled us.

“Scoot,” our mother said, and we scattered to the yard, having been given permission to fly, and we, with no wings. What transpired between adults we would never be privy to, so we fled, thankful for the excusal.

Eagle River was—and had always been—just a line to cross. We ran down with our thirst. We put in our feet, our faces, then our whole bodies. The cold water ran swift, and with a furor that cancelled the birds. We supplied the chatter, three girls always burbling, singing. In those days an axe couldn’t cleave us.

Lynn, ever the one with big ideas, said, “If we find fish we won’t be stuck eating cabbage.”

Angie shrugged and the hand-me-down blouse slipped, displaying her prominent collarbone that would bewitch the boys into their thirties. She said, “We’re soaked already anyway.”

Youngest and smallest, I really had no opinion they’d wait for. My wants were an afterthought. So I waded with them among the rocks near the Deep Hole, where Grandpa said he and his friends dove as boys. Rumors of an undertow, a vortex, a too-big-to-believe fish monster kept most children from the spot, and enticed daredevil teenagers like Billy McAllister, but this day in early June we were the only three pestering the river.

“We’re good swimmers,” Angie said, which braved us up because the river really was rushing.

While summer algae had yet to fix to the boulders, they were still especially slick and pointy on our insteps. We balanced and laughed and splashed and plunged our hands under whenever we spied what we thought were flashes of trout. Each time we slipped in we screamed, and we dared the fish: *You just try and get away!* We probably scared them off; they were maybe never there. The water was as cold as snow melt. We had a habit of inventing complex games so overpowering they dissolved time. *You can step but your heel must not touch ground. You may spin but the spinning must be with your eyes tightly shut.* Lynn was the queen of rules; you couldn’t escape her tyranny and you mostly didn’t want to. Games without Lynn directing were no games at all; our oldest sister enlivened our days. When she slept Angie and I slept too since we had no ideas worth mentioning. In ridiculous ways we tested each other and tested ourselves. Lynn’s was our lovely yoke.

Afternoon light folded in on us like an envelope, a cooler dark of which we'd been unaware.

"It could be rain," Lynn said.

The pause gave me permission to say, "My ankles hurt."

Even Angie glowered and said, "We were crazy to suppose we could catch fish with our hands."

Now we were against Lynn, where before we'd been with her. This is the way of girls, and especially sisters, fickle-hearted.

Downstream at Froggie's Tavern a fight had started, not between men but between a husband and wife—or at least a man and woman. We guessed all men and women were man and wife. We thought of them as pairs, each half of a whole, a union, one, because that's what the world teaches you until it splits open differently.

Lynn, who had already reached shore, was the first to hear. She stood righteous as a collie and cocked her head, raised her finger in the soft wind. "Listen."

Angie and I stopped splashing through the river bed. My ankles thundered with cold. There was shouting and commotion, from where we couldn't see. Thick trees obstructed the melee further out where Froggie's was tucked between the bend in the river and the road. Men barked and a woman screamed, and others who might help witnessed but dared not put an end to it. Whoever she was, her screams were as shrill and piercing as a banshee's. Her pleas froze me in the Eagle River. I recall the leaves above us not yet the wove-full canopy they'd be in a month, the sky promising a way out none of us, not even on tiptoes, could possibly reach. Have you ever heard a body hit a rock? A fat gourd hit the ground? A bag of laundry dropped from two floors? Then the end of screaming. No shouts, nothing, every crawdad to its hidey-hole, everyone hunkered down, everybody hushed.

Angie and I, we bolted to the shore regardless what noise our thrashing made. The three of us tore the way hares do, scatter-shot, with Lynn our leader, her hair streaming behind her like the carved woman on the prow of a ship.

"We're strong," Angie huffed, running past me. "We'll get away."

The sun returned, intensifying the gold-green woods that I watched swallow my sisters. Lynn said later they wouldn't have left me if they'd known I was lagging, but everyone was twice as fast or faster, and with my full-out running I didn't have space in my mouth to even shout to them. I felt shimmer all throughout my skin and my summer clothes, halo-ed, the

way artists depicted saints. A thousand needles stabbed the soles of my feet right through my shoes when I had to, just had to, stop. I squinted into the brilliance above me until my eyes teared. I might have whispered a prayer. I swear I wasn't crying.

When he stumbled up out of the ravine, it was his beauty amazed me. I thought he'd be scalded-looking like Grandpa --whatever brought that woman to ugly crying also had to be ugly--but no, the man with the yell that had iced me to my toes crooked his finger at me as he chewed at his lip, his mouth pulsing like a bee. He'd been on the move, and as I did, he needed to breathe. He had a silver moustache and same-colored hair all down to his shoulders, but with stark black eyebrows. Skin rippled around his eyes and his mouth, expressing the avalanche of ideas and guilt and escape plans crashing through his brain.

"Girl can keep a secret, can't you?" he whispered.

"What?" I said. I was a sucker for secrets. I stepped closer.

He nodded, smiling and encouraging me to close the gap. He crouched to my level, his chest heaving under its yellowed tee shirt. His knees hit the earth like he'd been struck by the Spirit, his dungarees writhed with his efforts at balancing. "Lord knows I'm not a bad man. I got children ages as you."

The briars he'd crashed through had drawn blood on his arms, dozens of tiny rivers the gnats tasted. Fast as I'd been running I'd avoided the briars; I knew how the tangles grew and where they'd been pressed back by animals, this was Eagle River. It was my familiar.

His grin made his whole face shine, his blue eyes had stars at their centers. He plopped his behind down. "Uh!" he said, looking dismantled.

I took another step. From his seat at the edge of the weeds, after scouting right and left, he whispered, "She ain't true. All along ain't been, and now I know it. Proof." With his one hand still extended he'd been face to the ground while his speech whipped up spit. He nodded and the spit thread bobbed, stretched until it hit dirt. A grown man drooling fascinated me. And Lynn always called *me* the baby!

His staring too many beats at the puddle embarrassed me, as if he'd peed himself and allowed me watch. "Place of judgment," he said, not to me but to the mud. To him I'd grown invisible, and I didn't like this shift. Six years old, and with two sisters constantly disciplining, I'd developed fury in being at anyone's mercy, or worse yet, being forgotten.

I said, "Who?" I stepped so I stood beside the stranger's knee, believing if I had to I'd lean into it and force back his focus. "Where?" I said.

His eyes widened at newly seeing me. My skin tickled with its shrinking as it dried inside my clothes.

"Here. Judgment all around us. And who?" He laughed joylessly. "Only everyone on his high damn horse."

Mother would have blistered me if she knew this man could whip his arm out and scoop me by my waist to cart me off. Surprise then, no, *wonder*, as he set his mouth against my neck. How had he turned out so close so swift? It was a brilliant move I couldn't wriggle from, and so I stiffened and pretended he kissed me the way I'd once spied Lynn and Billy McAllister clinched in our coal cellar, but the man only rested there, mulling his misdeeds and his wife he'd made scream and his daughter my age or thereabouts. The smell I knew from Daddy's brown bottle, the lips I knew from my mother and my sisters. I felt I might escape anytime and he couldn't stop me if he tried, but rather, I enjoyed him riveting on me, me the third sister, everyone's last thought. Innocent as a preacher, he had no ill intent.

He said, "What she don't know is..."

I let him go on because I simply loved his voice and his words tickling my neck.

"Much as she gadded about, I done too." He lifted his head from where it'd been tucked into me and stared at the river. He said, "But what man don't take his opportunity?"

The Eagle River had been coursing all this time, but its noise invaded us, broke us apart.

"Now what I've done?" he cried. "The hole be mine, the dark lonely hole."

He fled from me then, like a galloping horse, so four-legged-funny-looking I laughed. I thought it was a game except he never circled back. Maybe five or ten minutes I waited to see what would happen, hoping something would happen, and when it didn't I ran in his direction.

The Eagle River rounds up all its steam for a spectacular crash at Braxton Falls. A half mile south of Froggie's, the river dropped wondrous enough to draw lovers, the despairing, criminals, and soon to come, the hydroelectric. The spot had its Indian Maid ghost story and its rumor of bandit treasure hid among the rocks. We repeated these to thrill ourselves on dull evenings.

My stranger just further embellished Eagle River's lore as he bent at the railing of the overlook, peering into the spill, a jack knife of a man poised to cut water. My stepping made the wretched boards of the view place creak,

and he more felt it than heard it because all that pounding water only yards off from us superseded.

“You’d best leave me,” he said, but I would not run just yet.

Forget Lynn being all secretive about Billy McAllister’s pressing her upon a sun-baked boulder; my story would top hers.

In our backyard, I stalled among the lilacs while my pulse steadied, the sun scalding a giant coin on my back. Daddy tinkered in the garage. He always had a machine he was making over, steadying, improving.

Inside the house, our mother had put the cabbage on to boil, but otherwise all else was quiet. I imagined minutes ago, or was it hours ?, my sisters had run to tell her what they’d heard at the river. They would always have more gumption than I. And Mother would say, “Where’s your sister?” Each would blame the other for leaving me behind, but then they’d bluff Mother with some malarkey, the way they’d managed since they were very young. Only nine months apart and nearly of one mind, they told the most convincing lies.

The roiling cabbage created a smelly steam that condensed a circle on the ceiling. Our mother had strung her dish towel through the oven door handle, and I leaned in, put my head to it, my ears still full of Braxton Falls thunder. The towel smelled like the food Mother cooked. It smelled like her hair.

Rumbling voices behind the closed bedroom door made me think of the stranger, of what only I knew, my cries amid tumbling water likely no one would believe. I stood stuck in the hallway between the novelty of two bedrooms, where voices entered my brain without bias, and logic conjured Mother and Daddy on the other side of the door though I’d just heard Daddy in the garage. For a moment I thought the stranger and his wife had reunited in my very own house. The doorknob in my hand was nearly too much to grip as I peeked in on Lynn and Billy McAllister. Lynn had set her face in Billy’s neck the way the stranger’d done to me, while Billy moved his hand inside the front of Lynn’s shorts, the way the stranger’d done to me.

The Eagle River roared in my ears, and bent me like a branch on the rocks. I became the essence of flight, I was one with the stranger leaping, with too much to own up to and so casting off. My sister and Billy must have stepped over me when they came out but I don’t remember that because I was dreaming a man whose eyes at their centers shone like the quartz I picked from the Eagle River shallows, and he confessed once back to me his done-wrongs. Then Mother was kneeling beside me, tucking back my damp hair. She said, “What are you doing out here on the hall floor?”

Grandpa loomed behind, shadowing her. He said, “Don’t you recall I just brought you a bed?”

In the garage revved an engine. I’d heard whistling from the garage, but didn’t actually spy Daddy there although I smelled the familiar cigar smoke of a thousand family nights him playing with us *I See Something That You Don’t See*.

Mother marshaled me to the room with the new bed. Lynn had smoothed out every last wrinkle and crease. The bed was big enough so we three girls would sleep there for the next year or more, but in this instance I took the middle and even with my arms outstretched I could not reach the edges. I wore my mother’s dish towel like a fancy lady’s stole around my neck where the man at the overlook had kissed me. The towel was soft and slightly damp under my ear lobes with my mother’s sweat.

I later stumbled out to find Mother and Daddy sitting at the kitchen table, Daddy sucking the brown bottle, his color as high and flushed as his father’s. Grandpa had gone. I could hear my sisters murmuring from the back porch. Mother pulled me onto her lap to free with her fingers the twigs briared in my hair.

“What happened to you?” she said.

I knew not to blame Lynn and Angie, and I knew better than to tell her of the Eagle River ruckus and the beautiful man. “I got lost,” I said. “Where the path snakes into two.”

She said, “Oh, girls, they dream things,” her hand on my small head an erasure that could wipe away disaster. My mother had fear, but in her fears resided her power. She could make you do things, or her fears could. Or they could make you refrain from doing anything ever again.

Everyone said Fred Stern harbored the temper of a billy goat and the smarts of a jackass. Everyone called him a fool, but when it came to professing before the Sheriff no one would swear Fred was in the vicinity of Froggie’s that afternoon. The Eagle River, especially during the spring rush, swept all sorts of matter and pooled it in the shallows, and that included Nahalia Stern, who washed up bloated, battered, and blue as stone. A blue that cold batters your heart over and over, even a heart tough as Fred’s. Before he could be accused of any crimes, he plunged into the Deep Hole. Or he fell. Or was pushed.

I told you the boulders were jagged and slippery.

CHRISTINE SWINT

Illinois, 1973

They fluttered across newspapers like black
and white flags, smiles ready for the camera,
hair combed nice for yearbook picture day.
But this was summer, and thirteen girls lay in
cornfields and culverts, their bikes without riders,
wheels left spinning in the grass. Our legs
dangled with other legs at Pioneer Park pool,
blue anemones under dandelion suns,
our wrists wrapped with silver bracelets
stamped with names and numbers of P.O.W.s—
boys we imagined would some day love us.
Hot Tamale geraniums grew in time-lapse
stillness in my mother's window boxes
while we sat on the stoop and played jacks,
something about Watergate droning from inside,
something about bringing home the troops.
My mother's fingers, delicate as blades of grass,
pruned spent blossoms when she spoke to me.
Once she whispered about ovaries, hair
and other secret places. She told to me
to come home before dark, but I never would listen.
Cracked sidewalk moons continued to rise—
we'd roller skate on sidewalks, the bells
clanging us home for supper out of ear shot.
One night an owl called a single gospel note,
bats radioed from elm to elm, and a man
rolled his window down, inched past us,
a grin smeared under his nose, pants unzipped.
And then I did pedal home, pumping hard
down side streets to get away. Like a news flash
I saw their faces, and wondered if, like me,
the dead girls went riding alone in the dark.

JO BARBARA TAYLOR

Window on the Night

The moon reveals red paint
peeling off the barn,
rusted nickel cribs, midnight silos.
I lie on my stomach
hoping for a north breeze
through wire window screen,
observe the sultry night—
a time to watch for phantoms
inhabiting a farm in moon shadows,
to look for the boy who fell
out of the hayloft long ago.

I smell scythed clover and sun
still in prairie soil.
Light spills through leaves,
washes the woodshed raw.
The owl in the maple tree
calls *Ta-woot, Ta-woo*.
Does the boy still play in the loft
when no one is near?

Day-shift animals sing outrage
at the owl's song—soprano meows,
alto moo-snores, a barking tenor,
neigh-snorts on the beat.
An old hog adds bass.
It is a sonata and turns into a dirge
as I imagine the boy swinging
on a rope or riding a bale—
falling, falling

The laborers return to slumber,
and shadows darken the tale.
The barnyard smells like hay

and horses, so earthy, so sweet
I taste it in my throat.
Did he chase a swallow
from its perch, jump bales
of green hay and golden straw?
Did he follow the bird
out the door to catch a breeze,
discover too late he could not fly?

My chin rests on the weathered
windowsill. A breeze shivers
my nose. I swallow
the sore bubble of sorrow.
I see him go into the barn,
climb the ladder unobserved,
unprotected.
He is the moon's specter,
the boy who fell from the hayloft
long before I took up
wakeful watching.

KAREN TAYLOR

Attraction Deception

Daredevil grin,
flirting, evil eyes.
Dark skin, black hair,
strong, sinewy frame.
Swaggering, sultry
approach from loose hips.
Emotionless soul,
forever Winter in a
sunless heart.

JONATHAN TRAVELSTEAD

Money Tree, Border Patrol Detention Center

Dropping their bills beneath the tree
so that they are not identified and returned
to their home countries, captured immigrants
file inside for processing. Soon,
Benito Juarez, Christopher Columbus,
Jose Maria, and others lie clovered
beneath the twisted canotia tree.
But there is humanity here. I see it
in the agents in khaki and aviators who look away
from the queue of aliens shedding their colons
and quetzales, the American dollars
sent ahead to them, their nationalities wadded
like love notes from dying countries.

CARY WATERMAN

After War

Cambodia, 2007

The musicians of the Land Mine Victims' Orchestra
line up their prostheses on the wooden stage.
We play for work and not for pity, their sign says.
On another sign: Don't go too far off the trail.
There are not many old people.
When I ask a girl what she'll do with the dollar I give her,
she says, go to school, marry an American.

After the war people planted mango trees
around bomb craters filled with water.
Kids swam in the muddy holes.
Driving back from Angkor Wat we pass open fires
lit for dinner. It's like 5pm anywhere. Work done.
A guy on a cell phone comes out of his thatched house.
A pickup truck full of young men in headscarves blasts by.
A woman washes her man's lank black hair at a cistern.
Someone herds water buffalo under their house for the night.
There are rumors of Khmer Rouge everywhere.

In Phnom Penh, lilac jacaranda on the boulevard
where men sell parrots in wicker cages
and frangipani in front of the Army headquarters.
I sleep in a hotel across the street from the American Embassy,
our huge flag flying all night.
My roommate says it's the safest she's felt in days.

And it's true, people seem happy
which is what the Dalai Lama says we really want:
just happiness.
Each dawn the cocks crow,
smoke rises from cooking fires.
Bougainvillea blossoms blow

across the courtyard of the Genocide Museum
which was first a high school,
then a killing place, and now
just a place of remembering.

LISA ZERKLE

Particulate Matters

Before words, before
dinosaur, before flower or fruit,
before seed, no one is
alive. Dragonflies beat
wings two feet wide and careen
through Great Scale Trees.
Palm-like, these trees pole high
over brackish marsh,
branch into crown,
arcing spores into air
made sweet by their long
exhalation of oxygen.
Calamites stretch tall
from giant ferns in peat.
Their stalks telescope neatly,
leaning green spines. Finally
all topple into stagnant bogs.

Continents collide, ridge lines rise,
swamps drown in shallow seas.
Underneath, strata of root, trunk,
bark, spore, press into sediment
soft and dark and dense.

Some insist all that lived

before us is divine

provision, a larder

stocked for plunder, fair

excuse to remove mountains.

One day our bodies

will layer into fossil,

a thin scrim over earth.

For now we breathe

the smoke of ancients,

from the forests of stored light

we are burning.

CONTRIBUTORS

DAVID ADÈS is an Australian poet who moved to Pittsburgh in 2011. He has been widely published in Australian and American journals and magazines. Poems have recently been published or are forthcoming in *Atlanta Review*, *Australian Love Poems* 2013, *Bewildering Stories*, *Cordite Literary Magazine*, *Gutter Eloquence*, *Philadelphia Poets Journal*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Sleet Magazine*, *The Fourth River*, *Tincture*, and *Uppagus*. Ades has appeared on the Australian radio poetry program *Poetica*, and in 2013 on *Prosody*. His collection, *Mapping the World*, was commended for the Fellowship of Australian Writers Anne Elder Award 2008.

JEAN BERRETT has been publishing poetry since 1973, after she took the first graduate poetry-writing course to be offered by University of Wisconsin-Madison. She obtained an M.F.A. in Creative Writing-Poetry from Eastern Washington University in 1997 and has taught writing at College of Menomonee Nation. Other publications include translations from Virgil and Lucretius, as well as two short stories and two book reviews. Berrett has two grown sons and six grandchildren (soon to be seven).

ALLEN BRADEN is the author of *A Wreath of Down and Drops of Blood* (University of Georgia) and *Elegy in the Passive Voice* (University of Alaska/Fairbanks). His poems have appeared recently in *Terrain.org*, *Talking River Review*, and *Floating Bridge Review*. Braden was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

BARBARA BROOKS, author of the chapbooks *The Catbird Sang* and *A Shell to Return to the Sea*, is a member of Poet Fools. Her work has been accepted in *Chagrin River Review*, *The Foundling Review*, *Blue Lake Review*, *Granny Smith Magazine*, *Third Wednesday*, *Shadow Road Quarterly*, *Indigo Mosaic*, and online at *Southern Women's Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, and *Big River Poetry*, among others. She currently lives in North Carolina with her dog.

BILL BROWN is the author of eight collections of poems, and *Important Words*, a writing textbook. His new collection, *Elemental*, is forthcoming (3: A Taos Press, 2014). A two-time recipient of fellowships in poetry from the Tennessee Arts Commission, Brown was also named the 2011 Writer of the Year by the Tennessee Writers Alliance, a Scholar at Bread Loaf Writers Conference, and a Fellow at Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. In 2013, he had poems nominated for the Pushcart Prize and *Best of the Web Anthology*. Brown lives on a ridge north of Nashville with his Wife, Suzanne, and a tribe of cats.

LES M. BROWN, Professor Emeritus at Gardner-Webb University, is a native of McDowell County, North Carolina, in the Blue Ridge Mountains. He attended Appalachian State University and The University of Southern Mississippi. He is married to Dr. Joyce Compton Brown. They currently reside in Troutman, North Carolina. Brown taught biology and geology at Gardner-Webb from 1966 until 2006. Since retirement, he has been enjoying art, photography, and creative and scholarly writing, having published in several journals. One of Brown's poems was selected as a finalist for the 2014 North Carolina Poetry Society's Poet Laureate Award.

JOHN F. BUCKLEY lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he has been attending the Helen Zell Writers' Program at the University of Michigan. His second book of poems written in collaboration with Martin Ott, *Yankee Broadcast Network*, is scheduled to arrive on Brooklyn Arts Press in late 2014. His website is www.johnfrancisbuckley.wordpress.com.

SHARON CHARDE, a retired psychotherapist who has been a writing teacher since 1992, has won numerous poetry awards, the latest being first prize in the 2011 New Hampshire Poetry Contest. Charde has published in numerous journals and anthologies of poetry and prose, including *Calyx*, *The Paterson Review*, *Rattle*, *Poet Lore*, and *The Comstock Review*, and has had seven Pushcart nominations. She has also edited and published *I Am Not A Juvenile Delinquent*, containing the work of the adjudicated teenaged females she has volunteered with since 1999. She has two first prize-winning chapbooks, *Bad Girl At The Altar Rail* and *Four Trees Down From Ponte Sisto*, and a full-length collection, *Branch In His Hand*, published by Backwaters Press in November 2008, which was adapted as a radio play by the B.B.C. in 2012. She has been awarded fellowships to the Vermont Studio Center and the Virginia Center For The Creative Arts. Another chapbook, *After Blue*, will be published by Finishing Line Press in summer 2014. Charde was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

TOBI COGSWELL is a multiple Pushcart nominee and a Best of the Net nominee. Credits include or are forthcoming in various journals in the U.S., U.K., Sweden, and Australia. In 2012 and 2013, she was short-listed for the Fermoy International Poetry Festival, and also in 2013 received Honorable Mention for the Rachel Sherwood Poetry Prize. Her sixth and latest chapbook is *Lapses & Absences* (Blue Horse Press). Cogswell is the co-editor of *San Pedro River Review* (www.sprreview.com).

MAME EKBLOM CUDD has a B.A. in economics from Wells College and a master's in social work from Columbia University. She was a psychotherapist for a number of years before turning instead to writing. She has attended many workshops and conferences, including Squaw Valley Community of Writers in 2009 and 2011. She lives in Pennsylvania with her husband, Jim. He remains her great support, as do her children, Robert, Erin and William.

Originally from Wisconsin, **KATHERINE ANN DAVIS** received her M.F.A. from the University Maryland and is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Tennessee, where she is fiction editor for *Grist: The Journal for Writers* and is working on a novel about a failed collector.

DIANE DECILLIS' poetry has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes and *Best American Poetry*. She was awarded the Crucible Poetry Prize and Ocean Prize, and won the *MacGuffin* National Poet Hunt. Her full-length poetry book *Strings Attached* is forthcoming from Wayne State University Press (May 2014). Her stories, essays and poems have appeared in *CALYX*, *Evansville Review*, *Nimrod International Journal*, *Connecticut Review*, *Gastronomica*, *PMS: PoemMemoirStory*, *Gargoyle*, *A Gathering Of Tribes*, *Rattle*, *Slipstream*, *The Southern Indiana Review*, *The William and Mary Review*, and numerous other journals. She is coeditor of *Mona Poetica* (Mayapple Press), an anthology dedicated to Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa.

WILLIAM DORESKI lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and teaches at Keene State College. His most recent book of poetry is *The Suburbs of Atlantis*

(2013). He has published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in many journals.

SHELLY DRANCIK earned her M.F.A. in fiction at Queens University in Charlotte, North Carolina. Her fiction has appeared in *Relief*, *Zest*, and *Kansas City Voices*. A writing coach at Open Books, a non-profit bookstore, she lives in Chicago with her husband and three children.

ELIZABETH DREWRY'S poems have been published in various literary magazines, including *Arkansas Review*, *Tiferet*, *Kakalak*, *Naugatuck River Review*, and *Yemassee*. She was a finalist for the Joy Haro 2012 Poetry Competition, and runner-up for the 2013 Pocatigo Poetry contest. She has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. After a long newspaper career in New York and California, she now lives and writes in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Drewry was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

JESSICA GLOVER, winner of the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry, teaches for the English department and the gender and women's studies program at Oklahoma State University. She graduated from Missouri State University in 2009 with her M.A. in English. Currently, she is working on her first book as a Ph.D. candidate. Her latest work has appeared in *American Literary Review*, *Aesthetica*, *Magma Poetry*, *REED Magazine*, *Weave*, and *Moon City Review*. She won the 2013 Mississippi Valley National Poetry Contest, the 2013 Hard Times Writing Contest for Creative Nonfiction, and the 2012 Edwin Markham Prize for Poetry. Her work is currently forthcoming in *EDGE*, *Spillway*, *Pinyon*, *Comstock Review*, *Kindred*, and the 2014 MuseWrite anthology *Shifts*.

JESSE GRAVES teaches at East Tennessee State University, where he won a 2012 New Faculty Award. His first poetry collection, *Tennessee Landscape with Blighted Pine* (Texas Review Press, 2011), won the 2012 Weatherford Award in Poetry from Berea College and the Appalachian Studies Association, as well as the Book of the Year Award in Poetry from the Appalachian Writers' Association. He was also awarded the 2013 Thomas and Lillie D. Chaffin Award from Morehead State University. In summer 2014, Texas Review Press will release his second book of poems, *Basin Ghosts*.

Winner of *Prism Review's* 2012-2013 Poetry Prize and finalist in the 2013 Gearhart Poetry Contest from *The Southeast Review*, **JONATHAN GREENHAUSE** has received two Pushcart nominations and is the author of the chapbook *Sebastian's Relativity* (Anobium Books, 2011). His poetry has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *The Dalhousie Review* (CAN), *The Great American Poetry Show*, *The Malahat Review* (CAN), *New Millennium Writings*, *The Next Review* (UK), and *The William and Mary Review*, among others. He and his wife are being raised by their one-year-old, Benjamin Seneca.

KATHRYN BRIGHT GURKIN is the author of four books of poetry and a collection of comic essays, *Zen Ironing* (Main Street Rag, 2003). Awards and nominations include the Brockman Book Award from the North Carolina Poetry Society (1980), the Sam Ragan Award in the Fine Arts from St. Andrews College (1994), a Pulitzer Prize in Poetry nomination (1990), as well as two nominations for the Pushcart Prizes and various awards from literary magazines for individual and group poems.

CAROL HAMILTON has upcoming and recent publications in *Atlanta Review*, *Tribeca Poetry Review*, *Poet Lore*, *San Pedro River Review*, *The Aureorean*, *U.S. 1 Worksheet*, *The Penmen Review*, *Tar River Review*, *Presa*, *Nebo*, *Main Street Rag*, *Abbey*, *Lilliput*, *Storm Cellar*, *Bluestem*, *Turtle Island Review*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *Colere*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Reed*, and others. She has published sixteen books, children's novels, legends and poetry, most recently, *Master Of Theater: Peter The Great and Lexicography*. She is a former Poet Laureate of Oklahoma and has been nominated five times for a Pushcart Prize. She taught elementary school, community college, and in a university graduate writing program.

PATRICIA L. HAMILTON is a professor of English at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. Her work has recently appeared in *Connecticut River Review*, *Cumberland River Review*, *Innisfree Poetry Journal*, and *The Southern Poetry Anthology: Tennessee*. Her first volume of poetry, *The Distance to Nightfall*, is forthcoming from Main Street Rag Publishing. She has received two Pushcart nominations. Hamilton was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

CHAD HANSON serves as chairman of the Department of Sociology & Social Work at Casper College. His creative nonfiction titles include *Swimming with Trout* (University of New Mexico Press, 2007), and *Trout Streams of the Heart* (Truman State University Press, 2013). His manuscript, *Patches of Light: Prose Poems*, won the 2013 David Martinson-Meadowhawk Prize in Poetry. The collection is forthcoming from Red Dragonfly Press.

STEPHEN HERZ'S poems have been widely published. He is a winner of the New England Poet's Daniel Varoujan Prize. The collection, *Marked* (NYQ Books, 2014), is the culmination of two chapbooks, a volume of poems—*Whatever You Can Carry*—and many new poems that cover the years of this dark, bloody time of death and destruction and evil we call the Holocaust or Shoah. Several schools and universities have adopted Herz's poems as part of their Holocaust studies curricula. Herz lives in Westport, Connecticut, and New York City.

TOM HOWARD, winner of the 2013 Rash Award in Fiction, has had work appear in *Willow Springs*, *Quarter After Eight*, *Digital Americana*, and elsewhere, and his stories have received the *Willow Springs* Fiction Prize and the Robert J. DeMott Short Prose Award. A software engineer and magazine editor, he lives with his wife in Arlington, Virginia.

HADLEY HURY published a novel, *The Edge of the Gulf*, in 2003 to strong national reviews and followed it with a collection of stories, *It's Not the Heat*, in 2007. A former teacher and non-profit organizations executive, he was also for ten years film critic at *The Memphis Flyer*. His poetry and short fiction have appeared in numerous magazines including *Image*, *The James Dickey Review*, *Blue Moon*, *Avatar*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Forge Journal*, *Brink Magazine*, *Chapter 16*, *The Meadowland Review*, and *Off The Coast*. He lives with his wife Marilyn in Louisville, Kentucky.

ELIZABETH W. JACKSON is a practicing psychologist and writer whose prose has been published in a variety of fields including psychology, the visual and literary arts. Mostly, she loves poetry, though, and her recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Potomac Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, and *Zone 3*. Honors include grants awarded by the Vermont Studio Center and the United Arts Council. Jackson was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

ALICE OWENS JOHNSON'S stories and poems have been anthologized in *The National Story Project*, edited by Paul Auster, in *Kakalak, An Anthology of Carolina Poets*, and in the 2013 edition of *Gulf Stream, Poetry of the Gulf Coast*. Johnson has also been recognized in numerous writing contests, including an International Merit Award Winner for *The Atlanta Review's* 2012 poetry competition, first prize in the Tennessee Writer's Alliance for her short story "A Soft Tread," honorable mention in *New Millenium Writings* Contest, and finalist status in the Mighty River Short Story Contest. Poems, short stories and nonfiction have appeared in *The Great Smokies Review*, *The Lyricist*, *The Crucible*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *The Guilford Review*, *Maypop*, and the *O. Henry Festival of Stories*. Johnson was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

JAMES A. JORDAN received his B.A. from Centre College. He was a finalist for the Flo-Gault Poetry Prize, and the recipient of the 2010 Cantrell Prize. Previous work has appeared in the *Aurorean*, *Broad River Review*, and *San Pedro River Review*. He currently lives on his family farm, just north of Nashville, Tennessee. Jordan was an honorable mention finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Fiction.

Featured as one of "the greatest up-and-coming fiction writers today," in the Amazon description of *Best Short Stories from The Saturday Evening Post Great American Fiction Contest 2014*, **KENDALL KLYM** is the first-prize winner of the 2013 *Puerto del Sol* Fiction Contest, with "The Dancing Plague," a runner-up cash-prize winner in the 2013 Howard Frank Mosher Short Story Contest, with "Pavlova," and an honorable mention winner of *The Saturday Evening Post Great American Fiction Contest 2014*, with "The Continental." He has published short stories in *Cooweescoowee*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *Hunger Mountain*, and poetry in *The French Literary Review*, *Cottonwood*, *Flycatcher*, and *Thorny Locust*. Klym received a Ph.D. in creative writing from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, in 2010, and teaches writing and literature at Kennesaw State University outside of Atlanta. Klym was an honorable mention finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Fiction.

ROSIE KNOTTS is a senior English major at Gardner-Webb University, who also studies music and French. Knotts lives in Boiling Springs, North Carolina, and will graduate in December 2014.

JOHN P. KRISTOFKO, from Highland Heights, Ohio, is professor of English and the former dean of Wayne College in Orrville. His poetry, short stories, and essays have appeared in over a hundred different publications, including *Folio*, *Rattle*, *The Bryant Literary Review*, *The Cimarron Review*, *Blueline*, *Poem*, *Avocet*, *Iodine*, *Small Pond*, *The Aurorean*, *Ibbetson Street*, and *Blue Unicorn*. He has published two collections of poetry, *A Box of Stones* and *Apparitions*, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize five times.

LORI LEVY'S poems have appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Nimrod International Journal*, *Rattle*, *MacGuffin*, *The Comstock Review*, and a variety of other literary journals in the U.S., England, and Israel. One of her poems won Honorable Mention in the Anna Davidson Rosenberg Poetry Awards for poems on the Jewish experience, and Levy was featured in the October 2013 issue of the *Aurorean* as one of its "Showcase Poets."

KRISTIN LIEBERMAN received her B.A. from Simmons College, a J.D. from Albany Law School, and an M.F.A. from Antioch University Los Angeles. She was

a finalist for the James Kirkwood Literary Prize at UCLA Extension, where she earned her certificate in creative writing. She has studied with Jim Krusoe, Steve Heller, Sharman Apt Russell, and Alistair McCartney. In 2011, her essay “Thin-Skinned” and her short story “Salty Water” were both nominated for Pushcart Prizes. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *epiphany*, *New Madrid*, *Recovering The Self: A Journal of Hope and Healing*, and *SNReview*.

MERCEDES LUCERO is a first-year M.F.A. student at Northwestern University and has been published previously in the *Printers Row Journal* (*Chicago Tribune*), *North Central Review*, *Whitefish Review*, and many others. Her short story “Memories I Cannot Recall” was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

KENT MAYNARD teaches anthropology at Denison University; as a result, many of his poems are set in small villages in Great Britain or Cameroon where he has lived and worked for many years. He received an M.F.A. from New England College, and has published poems most recently in *Cold Mountain*, *Comstock Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *South Carolina Review*, and *Southern Literary Review*. A chapbook, *Sunk Like God Behind the House*, which confronts his experiences with the Kedjom people in Cameroon, received the Wick Prize for Ohio Poets, and was published by the Wick Program at Kent State University.

KAYLEE MCCALLAN is a junior at Gardner-Webb University. From Melbourne, Florida, McCallan is majoring in psychology and minoring in English. She has a passion for writing, especially poetry, and has just started to submit her works to magazines for publication.

SALLY STEWART MOHNEY, a North Carolina native, was awarded the Jesse Rehder Writing Prize from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her chapbooks are *pale blue mercy* (Main Street Rag Author’s Choice Series, 2013) and *A Piece of Calm* (Finishing Line Press, 2014). Women Centered Art in Charlotte exhibited her interactive poem installation and Sensoria Arts Festival staged several of her poems in 2013. She has presented her work at the Southern Women Writers Conferences and has published short stories and poems in various journals, such as *Boston Literary Review*, *Cellar Door*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, and *Town Creek Poetry*, among others. She lives in Atlanta with her family. Mohney was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

COURTNEY NEWTON, a senior at Gardner-Webb University, is seeking her undergraduate degree in psychology with a minor in English. She is from Pinehurst, North Carolina, and is a freelance poet who enjoys writing and hopes to one day become a licensed counselor.

TEDDY NORRIS holds an M.L.A. from Washington University in St. Louis. She was professor of English at St. Charles Community College for twenty years, where she taught poetry and creative writing and for five years was editor of *Mid Rivers Review*. For the past five years, she has served as a regional judge for Poetry Out Loud, the national poetry recitation contest for high school students. Teddy’s poetry has appeared in various journals and anthologies, including *Country Dog Review* and *Through a Distant Lens*, and she has work forthcoming in *The Switchgrass Review* and *Little Patuxent Review*. Norris was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

GRACE C. OCASIO is a recipient of the 2014 North Carolina Arts Council Regional Artist Project Grant Award. She won honorable mention in the 2012 James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition, first prize in the Sonia Sanchez and Amiri Baraka Poetry contest in 2011, and was a scholarship recipient to the 2011 Napa Valley Writers' Conference. Her first full-length collection, *The Speed of Our Lives*, is forthcoming from BlazeVOX Books. Her poetry has appeared in *Broad River Review*, *Rattle*, *Earth's Daughters*, *Court Green*, *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, and the *North Carolina Literary Review*. Her chapbook, *Hollerin from This Shack*, was published by Ahadada Books in 2009. She is a Soul Mountain Retreat fellow, Fine Arts Work Center and Frost Place alumna, and member of the Carolina African American Writers' Collective. Ocasio was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

SIMON PERCHIK is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *Almost Rain*, published by River Otter Press (2013). For more information, including free e-books and his essay titled "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities," please visit his website at www.simonperchik.com.

RICHARD KING PERKINS II is a state-sponsored advocate for residents in long-term care facilities. He has a wife, Vickie and a daughter, Sage. He is a two-time Pushcart nominee whose work has appeared in hundreds of publications, including *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Prime Mincer*, *Sheepshead Review*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *Two Thirds North*, *The Red Cedar Review*, and *The William and Mary Review*. He has poems forthcoming in *Bluestem*, *Emrys Journal*, and *December Magazine*.

HELENE PILIBOSIAN'S poetry has appeared in such magazines as *The Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *The Hollins Critic*, *North American Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Ellipsis*, *Weber: The Contemporary West*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, as well as many anthologies. Her poems have been recognized as winners and finalists in many contest, most recently placing first in the *Lucidity Journal's* Clarity Contest. She has published the books *Carvings from an Heirloom: Oral History Poems*, the Writer's Digest award-winning *At Quarter Past Reality: New and Selected Poems*, *History's Twists: The Armenians* (honorable mention), *My Literary Profile: A Memoir* (honorable mention from New England Book Festival) and *A New Orchid Myth*. She heads Ohan Press. Pilibosian was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

DIANA PINCKNEY lives and teaches in Charlotte, North Carolina. Her work has appeared in *Green Mountains Review*, *Cave Wall*, *RHINO*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Jasper Magazine*, *Streetlight*, *Calyx*, *Cream City Review*, *Pedestal Magazine*, and numerous anthologies and other publications. Diana has four collections of poetry, including *Green Daughters* (Lorimer Press, 2011). Five times nominated for a Pushcart Prize, Diana is the winner of the 2010 *Ekphrasis* Prize and *Atlanta Review's* 2012 International Poetry Prize. Her website is www.dianapinckney.com. Pinckney was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

DIANA REAVES splits her time between her sweet homeland Valley, Alabama, and Fayetteville, Arkansas, where she is an M.F.A. candidate and Walton Fellow in poetry at the University of Arkansas. Her poems have appeared in *Tar River Poetry*, *Boxcar Poetry Review*, *The 2River View*, and *Town Creek Poetry*.

STEPHEN REILLY'S poems have appeared in *Poetry South*, *Driftwood*, *Iconoclast*, and other publications. He is presently working as a staff writer for the *Englewood Sun*, a daily Florida newspaper with circulation in south Sarasota County, Charlotte, and DeSoto counties.

STEPHEN R. ROBERTS lives on eight acres of Hoosier soil, pretending it to be wilderness. He spends more time now with grandchildren, trees, and poetry, not necessarily in that order. It is the love of these things, along with lariats and other fine examples of rope that keeps him tying up words, unknotting poems. He has been published in *Briar Cliff Review*, *Borderlands*, *Willow Springs*, *Karamu*, *Water-Stone*, and *Yalobusha Review*. His two most recent of five chapbooks are *Rhubarb Desoto* and *Small Fire Speaking In the Rain*. His full length collection, *Almost Music From Between Places*, is available at Amazon from Chatter House Press.

NICOLE SAXTON, is a junior communications and English major at Gardner-Webb University. A student-athlete, Saxton fell in love with poetry at an early age. Saxton first published in 2008 in the Creative Communications Poetry Contest. In 2011, she published in the "Inside of Me" edition for the Live Poets Society of New Jersey. For Saxton, poetry is more than beautiful writing—it is her outlet, her war, and her peace.

MAUREEN SHERBONDY'S books are *After the Fairy Tale*, *Praying at Coffee Shops*, *The Slow Vanishing*, *Weary Blues*, *Scar Girl*, *The Year of Dead Fathers*, and *Eulogy for an Imperfect Man*. She received her M.F.A. from Queens University of Charlotte. Maureen lives in Raleigh, North Carolina with her three sons. Please visit her at www.maureensherbondy.com. Sherbondy was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

PAT SPEARS' debut novel, *Dream Chaser*, is scheduled for release in August, 2014, by Twisted Road Publications. Her short stories have appeared in the *North American Review*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Common Lives Lesbian Lives*, *Seven Hills Review*, *Habersham Review*, and the anthology titled *Bridges and Borders*. Her short fiction "Pink Moon" won second place in the Saints and Sinners Fiction Contest and appears in the anthology titled *New Fiction from the Festival 2012*. Her short fiction is forthcoming in *Snake Nation Review* and the anthology *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (Main Street Rag, 2014). Her short story "Stranger At My Door" received honorable mention in the 2013 Lorian Hemingway Short Story competition, and "Whelping" was a finalist for the Rash Award in Fiction. In 2009, she was nomination for a United States Artists grant.

MATTHEW J. SPIRENG'S books are *What Focus Is* (Word Press) and *Out of Body*, winner of the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award, and the chapbooks *Clear Cut*, *Young Farmer*, *Encounters*, *Inspiration Point*, and *Just This*. Since 1990, his poems have appeared in publications across the United States, including *Tar River Poetry*, *North American Review*, *The Cape Rock*, and *The Hollins Critic*. Spireng was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

CAITLIN B. STUCKEY grew up in Orient, Ohio, and earned an M.A. in English from Indiana State University. She taught composition and creative writing courses at Indiana State University for five years. Currently, Stuckey teaches English at Rajabhat Maha Sarakham University in Thailand.

CHRISTINE SWINT'S poems appear in *Slant*, *a Journal of Poetry*, *Tampa Review*, *Flycatcher*, *Hobble Creek Review*, *the Mom Egg Review*, and others. Her

poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and Best New Poets. As a student she won the Agnes Scott Prize for poetry. She holds an M.F.A. in poetry writing from Georgia State University and an M.A. in Spanish from Middlebury College. She lives in metro Atlanta, Georgia with her husband, two sons, and her dogs, Red and Duffy. She writes weekly at *Balanced on the Edge*, <http://christineswint.com>. Swint was an honorable mention finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

JO BARBARA TAYLOR lives near Raleigh, North Carolina. Her poems and academic writing have appeared in journals, magazines and anthologies. Her most recent chapbook is *High Ground* (Main Street Rag, 2013). Taylor was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

KAREN TAYLOR is a senior English major with a creative writing emphasis at Gardner-Webb University. She will begin graduate school in fall 2014 in Gardner-Webb's new online M.A. in English program. Taylor's poem "Mah Mah" appeared in *Wild Goose Review*. She lives in Rutherfordton, North Carolina.

W. SCOTT THOMASON is originally from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and is a graduate of UNC-Greensboro. He holds an M.F.A. from McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana. His fiction has appeared in or is forthcoming from *The Louisiana Review*, *The Sierra Nevada Review*, and *The Lindenwood Review*, the last of which nominated him for a Pushcart Prize. He lives outside of Philadelphia with his wife and two dogs, dreaming of Lexington-style North Carolina barbecue.

JONATHAN TRAVELSTEAD served in the Air Force National Guard for six years as a firefighter and currently works as a fulltime firefighter for the city of Murphysboro. He finished his M.F.A. at Southern Illinois University of Carbondale, where he now works on an old dirt-bike he hopes will one day get him to Peru. Travelstead was a finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

DONNA D. VITUCCI lives in an historic home in Northern Kentucky and loves walking along the Ohio and Licking Rivers. Her fiction and poems have appeared in dozens of literary magazines and journals in print and online, including *Meridian*, *Hawaii Review*, *Front Porch Journal*, *Sojourn*, *Oklahoma Review*, and most recently in *Watershed Review* and *GERM Magazine*. Her novel manuscript, *Feed Materials*, was judged a finalist for the 2010 Bellwether Prize, and is under agent representation. She has four finished novels in a trunk. She has a courtyard where she lovingly tends tomato plants each summer just like her grandma did. She's proud to be associated, in any small way, with the Rash Awards, even only as a finalist.

CARY WATERMAN is the author of five books of poems. Her last book, *Book of Fire*, was a finalist for the Midwest Book Award. Her poems are included in the anthologies *Poets Against the War*, *To Sing Along the Way: Minnesota Women Poets from Pre-territorial Days to the Present*, and *Where One Song Ends, Another Begins: 150 Years of Minnesota Poetry*. She teaches in the low-residency M.F.A. Program at Augsburg College in Minneapolis. Waterman was an honorable mention finalist for the 2013 Rash Award in Poetry.

DENNIS ZARAGOZA is a senior English major from Hendersonville, North Carolina. He is the 2014 winner of the J. Calvin Koonts Poetry Award, given each

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